

PATHWAY FROM PAIN TO PEACE: AN AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMAN
FINDING VOICE IN BLACK WOMANIST THEOLOGY AND LEADERSHIP

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

This was an autoethnographic study designed to assist me to understand my journey as daughter, mother, wife, teacher, and leader. Autoethnography was used as an examination of the author's perspective as the researcher, through a detailed examination of African American women in leadership and mothering, as a subject.

This study examined the lived experiences of two focus groups comprised of four African American Young mothers and four Older African American mothers. Additionally the study also examined the lived experiences of my father, husband, three aunts, and my three daughters. The objective was to gain an understanding of their perspectives on African American women as mothers and leaders.

The data were collected using reflexive journaling, interviews, and family photos. The data were analyzed using Nvivo for transcript analysis where reoccurring themes simulated to allow dominant themes to emerge. The study confirmed findings that 1) African American women as mothers show love in many ways, 2) African American women pass strength on as a legacy, 3) African American women rely on church and God in their leadership, and 4) African American women's views on education are paramount in the African American community.

The most insightful conclusions from the discussions were with the African American women and men were the emergence of my voice in Black Womanist Theology.

DEDICATION

I would like to express my love and gratitude to God for blessing me to arrive at that this juncture in my life. My Lord Jesus has guided me through every aspect of my life, from birth to now. He is the reason that I am who I am. Thank you, Father.

I pay homage to the precious memory of my mother Minnie Louise Neblett Smith.

Mama, your spirit has been a source of inspiration for my life. To my father. Reverend Charles Earl Smith, a pillar and constant in my life. You are the one I can always count on. Though we have had our struggles, one thing has never wavered, and that is your

love for me and my love for you. Thank you doing the work on yourself. It is acknowledged and appreciated. I will always be a “daddy’s girl” because you raised me that way. To my husband Allan Abney, you are my knight in shining armor. Words cannot begin to cover the length and breadth of the love and appreciation I feel for you.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

For many years I watched the evening news and at the end of the show there was a segment titled “Everybody has a Story,” In the segment, the reporter sets out to travel the nation by telling the life stories of ordinary people. He would travel from place to place by simply opening the telephone book and arbitrarily choosing a name and address for which to visit. Some of the most amazing things happened; he would find that ordinary people, in fact, had some pretty amazing life stories and what seemed to be just plain and ordinary, turned out to be provocative lived stories. Stories of the people highlighted were told in their own words and from their own perspectives and experiences.

Thinking about the way people shared their experiences gave me a determination to share my lived story and what has empowered me as a daughter, woman, educator, mother, and leader. The purpose of writing this dissertation is to help find meaning in leadership through sharing lived experiences and issues facing education, in order to strengthen the relationship between school administrators and parents in academic, social, and cultural contexts. Although this research is told through the lens of an African American woman in leadership, the portrayal of real women, mothers and daughters, will offer insight into Black culture as instilled and passed on from African American women as an embodiment of Black culture and heritage.

This dissertation will explore my lifetime of active engagement in resounding questions of my identity, more specifically the nature of my self-identity. My journey

from self-denial to self-discovery as a leader, daughter, wife, mother, and teacher and how this has shaped my leadership. The breadth of leadership, although unrecognized, had been marinating within me for most of my life. I wanted to discover more about myself as an African American woman and what I received from my mother and the transfer of empowerment through love, strength, and independence to those who continue to be a vibrant part of my life (my father, my husband, my children, and my African American mentees).

Statement of the Problem

African American learners in public schools are systematically challenged in urban, suburban, and rural settings. The quality of their educational life is often placed at risk or compromised which results in a “receivment gap” (Chambers, 2009). While most status quo research details a persistent achievement gap, the onus of intervention is best served when school leaders examine and study the structures and systems designed to serve African American learners. Rather than utilizing a deficit-thinking model that situates the challenge as resting primarily with the learner and his/her family, a strength perspective provides a more culturally respectful method for understanding the academic needs and support needed for African American learners and their families (Anderson, 2007). Moreover, the implications for school principals, who serve significant populations of African American mothers, who are challenged by schools that are historically resistant to the “realities” of their children’s lives, are enormous.

While African American learners make up 16% of the public school population in the United States, they account for more than 30% of the discipline, suspension, and

expulsion population in public schools (National Assessment of Educational Progress [NAEP], 2011). Further, they account for 32% of those learners identified as having a cognitive disability and 28% of those youth identified as demonstrating emotional disabilities (NAEP, 2011). More significantly, African American youth achieve the lowest academic outcomes when compared to European American learners (Ford & Helms, 2012; Howard, 2011; Thompson & Allen, 2012). Further, while No Child Left Behind (2001) legislation targeted the engagement of families as an intervention to improve school outcomes, little research has systematically been done to fully understand some of the realities of African American life from a strength perspective that supports and understands African American family engagement. Understanding the role of an African American mother holds great promise in principals better supporting those mothers and the teachers who teach their children (Gay, 2000; Howard, 2011).

My Personal Story

I have always prided myself on wanting to be like my mother in many aspects. I wanted to be a meticulous dresser, a studious student, and more than anything, a hard-working woman. However, I had no idea how multi-faceted she had been from an early age. As a daughter, I thought I knew everything there was to know about my mother. I had heard countless stories about her intuitiveness and tenaciousness as a young woman for most of my life. I love to sit and talk to my aunts because they share family stories and tell of what life was like for them growing up. This was how I learned about my mother, the civil rights activist. It was just after my mother passed away. My family congregated and began to reflect on her life.

My Mother

My mother was number five out of nine children in her family. She was a strong woman of great convictions. She was always known as a bright student, who excelled academically. She graduated valedictorian of her class and was the first to go to college in her family. She attended Business College and later decided to pursue a career in nursing. She was one of only a few African American females to graduate from a local nursing program. She was also known as the independent one in her family. She purchased a home and car on her own at the age of 25.

My Aunts' Memories

My mother's sisters reminisced about her being one of the first to go away to a business college in West Texas, while living with my great aunt and uncle. After my mother finished her time at the business college, she later went to a historically Black college in Houston, where she continued her studies in business. While she was a student, she became actively involved in the Civil Rights Movement. It was no secret to anyone in the family that she was an opinionated woman, who had a streak of independence, much like my grandmother, that made her head strong and outspoken. However, my grandmother had no idea my mother was in Houston becoming radically involved in sit-ins and non-violent demonstrations of civil disobedience, until one day my mother was being arrested on the news.

My mother and a group of Black students staged a sit-in at the restaurant counter of a local department store. She and the other young adults entered the "Whites only" front door of the store/restaurant and sat at the lunch counter and refused to move from

the “whites only” section until they were physically removed and arrested. Of course, my grandmother went to Houston as soon as possible to bail her out of jail. However, according to my aunts, my mother was not deterred by the arrest. Instead, she continued to rally and demonstrate once she was brought home from Houston.

As I heard this story for the first time (at age 28), I thought about what I had known of my mother for most of my life and how much she believed in standing up for a cause. I now think in many regards, that learning about my mother as a civil rights activist was a clear sign to me that my passion for education could be regarded as her passing the torch to me so I could continue the advocacy for the education of African American children. In addition, learning about my mother as an activist has helped me to learn more about myself as woman, mother, daughter, and wife.

The History of Education

According to the research, public schools began in New England colonies of Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New Hampshire in 1600. As the number of immigrants grew, people became increasingly disgruntled by the teaching of the clergy and the spreading of unwanted religious doctrine. In the 1840s, following the Declaration of Independence, the public school system was born and made available to the wealthy. In 1852, the first laws requiring attendance were passed (Reese, 2001). By 1918, nearly 20 states passed laws requiring children to attend at least elementary school. However, the passing of the laws did not make education available to African American children.

Although the history of education reflects a general overview of the public school system, it does not reflect the plight of African American children and their

exposure to public schools during this time. The achievement gap patterns began as early as the 1800s. African American students have encountered various achievement gaps over time (Anderson, 2007). Anderson (2007) also asserts, these barriers have encroached upon the cultural competence and intellectual confidence of African American students and has been impeded by the test score gap. The historical context of the plight of African American children offers an overview on how disparities in academic achievement have manifested over time for these students.

African American Education

According to Iron's (2002), the Great Compromise only served to support the benefits of White supremacy while furthering the appeal for the continuation of slavery. Whites reveled in the use of Jim Crow laws to support the White-on-Black domination that was prevalent in both the North and the South before and after the Civil War. Jim Crow laws were segregation laws that were passed to place barriers between Whites and Blacks in the South (Alexander 2012). Blacks largely viewed their escape to the North as a pilgrimage to the promised land of freedom however; they were met with continued discrimination and hostility.

After the reconstruction period following the war, there was a return to White power and dominion. Kluger (2004) stated that the abolishment of slavery rendered a large price tag that carried with it the resentment of Whites due to the loss of their economic investments. Whites no longer had the right to enslave Blacks against their will, so they inflicted oppression through the use of Jim Crow laws, educational discrimination, lack of voter rights, and the exacerbation of White privilege in

government and social institutions. We are still experiencing the residual effects of years of systemic racial domination (Alexander 2012). Irons (2004) stated:

Many blacks, even those with little or no education, were unhappy that their children were forced to attend segregated schools, many of them housed in churches or private homes, and most lacking desks and books for each other. (p.

#)

According to Alexander (2012) *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) was unique, however. It signaled the end of “home rule” (Alexander, 2012) in the South with respect to racial affairs. The supreme ruling in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, according the Irons, has left our schools more segregated now than before the ruling. Even after the ruling, many schools were not integrated until the early 1970s. Thus, the *Brown* decision is an important aspect of the historic educational foci of the schooling practices that affected African Americans in United States (Alexander, 2012).

Following the *Brown* decision, the education of African American students made some modest gains. However, presently in some cases the gains have been reversed due to the damaging impact of re-segregation (Alexander, 2012). The impact of this decision still resonates in schools in the Deep South, and even within the schools of Texas.

According to Smith (1999):

Despite gross inequalities *Brown* was decided on the premise that “separate but equal is inherently unequal.” When in fact mere separation was not the issue; segregation was. Segregation was one then; separation was another; and inequality yet was another. (p. 15)

Alexander (2012) stated:

In the years following *Brown v. Board of Education*, civil rights activists used direct-action tactics in an effort to force reluctant Southern states to desegregate public facilities.

By understanding the impact of *Brown*, the historical perspective is used to contextualize the state of education for African American learners, prior to and following the *Brown* decision, as described in the post-*Brown* era.

While education in the 21st century has progressed far beyond the historical years of early schooling for African American learners, we as educators must, in retrospect, look at where we have come from in our educational system in order to ascertain where we are headed for the future as a nation, especially as it pertains to the education of African American children. Historically, the African American student was viewed as having low intellect and below average achievement levels (Collins & Butler, 2007). Consequently, this created a system of underachievement for children of color who have become marginalized through the actions of educators and the use of standardized tests with achievement on these tests (Blanchett et al., 2005). Although it has been 60 years since the ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), school administrators must continue to strive for ways to promote the success for children of color. School leaders must seek to understand the influence of the Black church in the Black community and how much the Black community relies on the church to promote the academic success of children of color.

Overview of the Black Church

The Black church has been deemed the beacon of hope, where people go for refuge within the African American community. It became the institution that brought a marginalized people together (Barnes, 2005), especially as it relates to education. In fact, it is near impossible to separate the Black church from Black culture in the U.S.. The emphasis of spirituality can be traced back to the times of slavery. The reliance on spirituality and fellowship were the basis for the strength-building for many African Americans during this time. Negro spirituals during the 1800s were a means of spiritual release and communication among slaves on plantations (Kelley, 2008; Kolchin, 1995; Nash, 2007). The growth of the church did not wane after Blacks were freed from slavery but rather grew over time.

As Blacks began migrating to different parts of the United States, churches were erected in various parts of the country. Most notable was the role Black churches played in the struggle for equality in education for Black children in 1816. The Black church became the meeting place for civil rights meetings and worship services alike. The Black church also became the meeting place for the uniting of the Black community (Barnes, 2005; Childs, 2009). Various denominations began to emerge such as African American Methodist Episcopal (AME), Baptist, Methodist, Church of God in Christ, and Catholic. The church denominations have specific doctrines of beliefs on baptism however, the foundation of each denomination is the belief in Jesus Christ as God's son. They are each governed by the spreading of this gospel through the love of humanity and care for the indigent.

Baptists believe in the immersion baptism as a profession of faith in Jesus Christ. AME holds that women can pastor a church. Methodists also hold to their belief in the technique of sprinkling during baptism. The Church of God in Christ believes that there are two baptisms, one in the Holy Spirit and one by the immersion into water in the name of the Holy Trinity. Although the church doctrines are different, the common thread between each of the denominations and the common focus of uniting the Black community is through their belief in God and spirituality. Pastors and priests have long been revered as influential leaders in the Black community.

In the Black community, family cultivates the perpetuation of religious beliefs by embracing biblical precepts often passed down from generation to generation. African Americans use the relational aspect of church fellowship to foster a cultural context of racial identification. In other words, African Americans, as a people, often come to know themselves based on church affiliation and shared beliefs (Mattis, 2001). The core of those beliefs have branded the spiritual experience for which the Black church has been characterized (Barnes, 2005).

Education and the church have remained the most important influencers in my life. My first acknowledgment of how the two were entwined in my life, is exemplified through Sunday school which was a significant part of my childhood. All that I learned in school from reading to math were also taught or utilized in Sunday school. It was understood that if you achieved well at school, it would also be reflected in what you did in church. I grew up with that understanding and it helped to motivate me to do well in school.

Overview of the Research Instrument

As an African American woman born in the 20th century, I grew up through the complexity of a changing world. Born just after the initiation of the civil rights movement in 1966, I grew up during a time of social change. I started school after desegregation and never fully realized the significance of going to an integrated school, even though I lived in a Black community. It has taken me 47 years to truly ascertain my own trajectory as a woman, daughter, wife, mother, and daughter-in-law. Growing up in the Black church solidified my core beliefs as a child of God and the very essence of my identity as a woman. My faith is what anchors me as a person. My faith is the phenomenon upon which everything that I am or will become hinges. My belief in faith is derived from Hebrews 12:1, as the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen. It is this fundamental belief that makes me believe in hope for all that is good and right.

I believe that my faith has led me down a career path that became much more than I anticipated. I began my college career as a sociology major however, after taking an education course as an elective, I changed my major my junior year. I feel in love with education and it seemed to be natural fit for me and my personal aspiration to serve and to promote learning. After 21 years in education, I still feel the same passion to serve and to teach. I am currently working as a instructional and curriculum specialist in a local school district. As the leader of my department, I rely on my faith daily to make decisions and to help me navigate in my position as spiritual leader who also leads in my role as an educator.

My Mother

For years, I lived my life as a “privileged” only child with an abundance of material blessings. My relationship with my parents has been both a source of contention, and at times, even joy. I grew up in the shadows of my mother. She was a nurse and for most of my life, she took me everywhere she went. In my adult life we became best friends and confidants.

My mother lived life to the fullest. She seized the opportunities of destiny to leave her mark on the world. One of the greatest gifts she left for me was the gift of life. Her legacy of living has been passed on to me and from me to my children. She began her life as the fourth of nine children and was often referred to as the courageous, outspoken, and independent one. She demonstrated this time and time again throughout my life, whether it was seeking for more education, a better neighborhood in which to live, or a better car to drive. She seemed determined to desire the best that life had to offer. Part of my aspiration for achievement is derived from seeing her ambitious fortitude.

I can recall a particular conversation about life that I had with my mother when I was a junior in high school. She gave explicit instructions about her academic expectations of me. The conversation was the result of a C I earned in geometry on my report card. My mother was adamant about me understanding that being average was unacceptable, regardless of what anyone else thought or did. It was not the standard by which I would conduct myself as her child. My mother raised me to excel beyond the expectations of my teachers and peers. She always concluded her lectures with, “Is that

clear?” and my answer was always, “Yes, ma’am.” It was her way of making sure what she said went beyond my ears and embedded in my brain.

As horrible as it felt, I knew that day that my mother expected me to be smart like her. She was the valedictorian of her graduating class in 1960. I also knew that she had been grooming me to be the best person I could be and to even exceed her own accomplishments as an astute college student, civil rights activist, and award winning nurse. Although I cried that day, I felt that she was teaching me a lesson that I would always remember concerning perseverance and tenacity. I could not imagine ever making an A or B in geometry, but on that particular day I knew that my best was required of me. That meant I was going to have to try even harder to measure up to my mother’s standard of academic success. Now I know those to be life lessons that began shaping me long before I ascertained the gravity of how they would profoundly impact me throughout the course of my life.

My Father

My relationship with my father is a complicated one. I grew up as a daddy’s girl when it came to acquiring material things, but, as an adult, things were very different. At times, it can even be described as a love-hate relationship. My earliest memories of my father come more from home movies than from actual heart-warming memories. It has certainly evolved over time and continues to be a delicate work in progress. Growing up an only child left me open to so many wonderful experiences, however, it also left me open to many traumatic experiences as well.

My parents fought for as long as I can remember. I grew up hearing the sounds of broken dishes, name calling, cussing, door slamming, cars speeding, blood gushing, sounds of slapping, punching, screaming, wailing, and furniture being thrown around. In fact, I grew up living part time at home and the other times with my aunt across the street. I grew up afraid of my father.

To me, I knew him as the man who went to church on Sunday and also the man that terrorized my dreams on almost any given week day, especially if it was a payday week. My father was an alcoholic. We all knew it. My mother and I lived with this reality. Alcohol was an uninvited family member that showed up more and more throughout my childhood. I know that the impact of alcohol abuse severely hampered my relationship with my father for many years. It hindered our ability to have what I call a “real” father-daughter relationship, especially during my young adult years. I felt like I had no choice or say in the matter when I lived at home. I made it my mission to do well in school during the latter part of my high school career. It was not that I felt he was not a father to me. He was a dysfunctional father. When he was not drinking, he was fun to be around and we could enjoy quality family time. However, the older I got, the more I saw the habitual behavior for what constituted the dysfunction. It made me anxious to leave home and go far away from him.

There were times when my father did truly wonderful things for me as his daughter. He taught me how to change a flat tire, purchased three cars for me by the time I was 18, and helped me to secure very good jobs in banking early in life. His care and concern were evident in these particular instances but, the drinking caused a great

deterioration of our relationship because of the hurtful, neglectful, and deliberate actions of my father with regard to recognizing his problem for what it was. I grew angry and bitter over time, and consequently, the cars, money, and lifestyle we had acquired as a family did not matter much to me.

As a young adult, my life felt hopeless, unstable, and dismal. I wanted out and I wanted to be away from home and away from my father and his drinking. He just did not get it. I tried many times to get him to stop the drinking through begging and pleading. I still remember having major asthma attacks as a child from all the stress of the shouting, violence, and instability in our home. Part of me relives the episodes of heart palpitations and deafening headaches, loud heart beats, and the frantic desperation of trying to keep my father from his violent rages. It was absolutely horrible.

I always knew my father loved me. He seemed to me to be a man conflicted and tormented by a problem that he did not see as a problem, but rather saw it as a way of life. He was a bartender and drinking seemed natural for him. He drank with his brother, his friends, and with other relatives. He drank. He changed. He morphed into someone else. He came back. He became this other person while under the influence of alcohol, but once he slept it off, he was always remorseful and sweet. It was easier to love him after the stormy episodes and it was easier to hate him when he changed. I spent most of my childhood both loving and hating my father. I know that seems impossible, but to me it was my reality. As a young child and then an adolescent, I could not decipher between hating him and hating his actions. All I knew was the same man I loved also caused enough pain for me and my mother that I also hated him.

I finally escaped this torment by going away to college in 1986. One of the most amazing things that came out of me going away to college was seeing the joy in my father when I returned for weekend visits. Life was far from perfect, but because he was so excited about me coming home, he would go to great lengths to barbecue and wash and perform maintenance on my car.

My Husband

I met my husband, Allan, in 1986, and we began our life together as husband and wife in 1988. I think the role of wife has taught me more about myself in the past 26 years, than I ever thought possible. Growing up as an only child, I did not have to share anything with anyone. Marriage quickly taught me how to share my life with another person. Because my grandfather was Methodist pastor, I watched my grandmother in her role as a pastor's wife and declared to myself that I would never marry a minister. Little did I know, Allan announced his calling to ministry a month after I accepted his proposal of marriage. I think that was my first big lesson on what it means to be self-less. Although, it meant accepting a life I thought I never wanted, we have worked tirelessly in ministry together for 28 years (this includes two years before we married). In fact, within two months of meeting Allan, he presented me with an ultimatum that compelled me to end a long-term friendship with a childhood friend. It was an exciting time that allowed me to solidify a true relationship with Christ.

Born out of my role as wife, came a new responsibility in ministry as First Lady and, as time progressed, to Co-Pastor. We have served three congregations and I have gone from being the church custodian, cook, Sunday school teacher, women's ministry

leader, to the Co-Founder and Co-Pastor of a non-denominational church in a suburban community. Life as a Pastor's wife requires much dedication and sacrifice. This role also requires me to be flexible and adaptable to changes that are brought to me by various personalities and problems. Leadership is a very important aspect to what I do in ministry and how I live my life. The biblical principles are what I rely on most to guide my decision-making. It is also the foundation for my core values.

My Life as a Mother and as a Daughter-in-Law

My journey has taken me from my former years of growing up as an only child to my mother and father, to becoming a wife to my husband of 26 years, and mother to three daughters, ages 25, 23, and 22. When I think of my life, I think my greatest role is that of a mother. I grew up never really being fond of children. I guess that was really the selfish aspect of my personality back then. It was not until I was told by my physician that I would never be able to have children that the desire to be a mother began to take root in my heart. When God granted me the miracle of my first born, I knew that I was blessed to be given the opportunity to be a mother. My daughters are all grown up now, two are college graduates and the youngest is a senior in college. They are my pride and joy. Being a mother is gift from God.

I was in a stage of growth just after my children were born. I had both the influence of my mother and my mother-in-law, Irene. Until this point, Irene and I had a difficult relationship. She was on one side trying to maintain her influence with Allan and I was on the other side trying to pull him towards me. We did this tug of war for about ten years, until one day we decided to try and build our relationship. My mother-

in-law was also a nurse. Although she entered my life through my relationship with her son, I had never met a woman that showed love with such intensity. I watched as she showered her three children with unwavering love and support. It was apparent that she loved them each individually, however it was just as apparent that she loved them with such intensity, that I am not sure they realized the magnitude. She never missed a game, concert, or special event for any of them. She loved without reservation.

Life lessons are learned at different stages. I had no idea that my mother-in-law Irene, would impart her own wisdom for life to me but, she did just that in so many ways. One of my greatest life lessons came at a moment when I was feeling challenged with my tumultuous relationship with my father. Irene and I had a conversation concerning my father and his brief stay in trouble with the law. I was perplexed as to whether I should bail him out, or leave him in jail. She quickly and firmly told me that my father's troubles were not a burden that I was meant to bear. I can still hear her words as they echo in my mind, "Honey, the only life you can live is your own. Do you hear me?" Once again, there was another question for me ponder. "Do you hear me? Am I clear? Do you understand?" I was asked these questions as if she and my mother were speaking to my inner ear. It was their voice speaking to my own voice, not yet heard or developed. They wanted to know did I hear the life lesson they were attempting to teach me. Did I hear the woman's voice? That is one of the legacies of an African American mother, she seeks a way to teach or parent through a form of impartation, an attribute of the African American woman as mother.

Purpose of the Study

The focus of this study was to research my pathway as a woman in search of finding my own voice in Black Womanist theology. As mother, I am passionate about leaving a legacy of voice for my daughters to emulate. I wanted to know how they see me as a woman and mother, along my pathway to the doctorate.

My life has been a puzzle that has taken shape over time through my childhood and into adulthood. I went on to pursue a college education a semester after finishing high school. After a mere month of being in college, I renewed my spiritual relationship and began a quest to live my life from a more spiritual aspect. This determination changed the course of my life and put me on a path to merge both my educational goals and my religious pursuit.

The purpose of this study was to answer the resounding questions of why I feel so passionately about education, what had I received from my mother with regard to education, and what have I passed on to my daughters, concerning the value and relevance of education in their lives. Furthermore, I wanted to determine what influences have shaped how they perceived education, perseverance, and success. As a mother, I hoped to ascertain how much I have influenced them in their development as they have grown from being girls to becoming women. As an African American woman, I hoped to discover the influences of other African American women and their mothers.

My life has not only been influenced by the female perspective, but it has also been impacted by my father and husband. The lives of these men have been entwined

with me as a wife, daughter, and woman. From a broader perspective, African American men who have been reared and influenced by an African American woman and thusly, have developed their own perspective of the role the African American female leadership style and how it has impacted their lives, was of great importance to me. As a researcher, I wanted to learn about the perceptions and perspectives of my father and husband in order to see how they perceived their own mothers, wives, and daughters.

Intended Contribution to Theory and Practice

This autoethnography, as a qualitative research method, will be used to contribute to the need for an epistemological perspective based on the collective experiences of the Black woman (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002) and my emergence as Womanist. This dissertation explored my lifetime of active engagement in resounding questions of my educational, cultural, and spiritual identity. Moreover, the nature of my self-identity as an African American woman, and my journey from self-denial to self-discovery as a leader, daughter, wife, mother, and teacher, have been compelling forces in this exploration from pain to power. Further, the analysis of the impact of relational derivations in my life history has served as a vehicle to inform my roles as a leader and a mentor to other African American women. Contextually, these lived experiences were storied as a construction of my self-identity and the embodiment of Black womanhood. Finally, this dissertation analyzed the impact of my lived experiences, as told from a womanist theological perspective. Some of the results of this exploration were used to study the voices of African American mothers whose children are struggling in school as a result of the education they “receive” (Chambers, 2009). This study is intended to add

to the body of literature on African American women and their leadership roles in education and parenting from a Black Womanist Theology perspective.

Research Questions

The following questions guided this autoethnographic exploration:

1. Who am I as an African American daughter, woman, wife, mother, teacher, and leader?
2. What has been the impact of being raised by an African American woman who experienced domestic violence?
3. How do my experiences support the plight of African American mothers who experience struggles with schools as they raise their children?

Methodology

This autoethnographic study first allowed me to journal and be reflexive about my life experiences as it relates to my formal and cultural education. I interviewed aunts who grew up with and loved my mother, who is now deceased. I also interviewed my father, husband, children, and other women I have mentored. I studied the patterns of resistance in the education of African American learners. I conducted a series of focus groups with mothers with whom I currently work with in a church setting, to explore their lived experiences for the purpose of giving voice to the strength perspectives they “live” while raising African American school aged children. Finally, I analyzed the impact of these experiences as they relate to effective leadership in schools.

Data Sources

This autoethnographic study included an analysis of interview results from two focus groups. One focus group consisted of four young African American mothers, who are mothering African American children. The women from this focus group were asked to share their experiences as mothers and also what it was like to be mothered by an African American mother. The other focus group was comprised of four African American women, who had been mothered by African American mothers. The women from this focus group were asked to share their perspectives regarding their mothers and what it was like to be mothered by an African American woman.

Because the study focused on the impact of my lived experiences, individual interviews with my father, three of my aunts, my husband, and my three daughters were also conducted. They were each asked to share their perspectives on their own mothers. My father, husband, and daughters were asked to also share their perspectives on my trajectory as a woman, daughter, wife, and mother.

Limitations to the Study

As a qualitative research method, the autoethnography limits the way in which data is collected. As the research instrument, I relied on field notes, journaling, focus groups, and interviews to collect data. The focus groups were specifically made up of African American women who were mothers or have been mothered by an African American woman, thereby, including only women who met these qualifications.

Autoethnography is a genre of research and writing that is characterized as a personal or self-narrative in which the author is able to connect with the culture being

researched (Anderson, 2006; Price, 2006). According to Price (2006), in autoethnography, the author recounts their own experiences and thoughts. These experiences are generally told in first person, allowing the author to share thoughts, feelings, self-awareness, and dialogue. This limits the results of the study to the perspectives of others. Because I know each participant personally, as the researcher, I attempted to conduct the interviews from a perspective based on my perceptions of my growing and evolving “self.”

Overview of Study

Chapter I offered an introduction to the history of education, an overview of the Black church, an overview of the research instrument, the purpose of the study, data sources, and the limitations of the study. Chapter II offers a review of the literature for African American women and Black Womanist Theology, and an examination of the importance of African American education from a national, state, and local perspective. The literature review also examined perspectives on the Black church and African American women in leadership and strength perspective. Chapter III offers the methodology of the study, autoethnography as research methodology. Chapter IV offers a description of the author’s journey and an analysis of data from the research participants, as well as the analysis of themes. Chapter V offers an analysis of the findings from the study, recommendations, and implications for further research.

Definition of Terms

Autoethnography-a qualitative research method using the researcher as the research instrument.

Black and African American- These terms are used interchangeably for the purpose of this study.

Achievement gap -the disproportionality of academic success between African American children and their White counterparts.

Receivment gap-the disproportionality that demonstrates what and how African American students achieve academic success between African American children and their White counterparts (Chambers 2009).

Resilience-overcoming adversity; the ability to overcome against all odds (Laditka,, Murray & Laditka, 2010).

Strength perspective-the viewpoint of being strong (Boykin, 1983; Webb-Johnson, 1994).

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Who can find a virtuous woman? For her price is far above rubies.

The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil.

She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life.

She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands. ~Proverbs 31:10-13

Introduction

In Proverbs 31: 10-13, King Solomon asked the question, who can find a virtuous woman? It has been the quest for many women, myself included, to find their place in the world. Many of us search for validation from many places but, the place we long for the greatest acceptance from is our family, and from the work for which we have sown our lives. The validation of self becomes more than just knowing who we and what we do, to understanding why we are the way we are and why we do what we do. For me, King Solomon's question became a challenge for me, as a woman, to truly understand myself as a Black woman positioned in my roles personally and professionally.

My journey, as a woman, has transformed over the years. I am currently 47 years old and I have experienced my evolution as woman from the past to my present. Of course, as a woman, I certainly felt the transition as I progressed through my storied past, to what I now see as the evolution of self. This evolution has pushed me to find my voice as a Black womanist theologian in educational leadership by chronicling my life experiences, the experiences of others, and the body of literature that has lent itself to

assisting in finding my voice as an African American woman situated in Black womanist theology.

It is difficult to separate my beliefs as a woman from who I am as a leader, researcher, and woman. My pursuit in life has been substantiated by my spiritual compass and my moral fortitude that I have learned biblically and through spiritual guidance from my mother. I was taught that the training that a child receives from a parent never leaves them as referenced in Proverbs 22:6: “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” This fundamental principle was one that steered my beliefs. These beliefs have become the conduit to building principles for leadership. Not only for me but, spirituality has been used as a conduit for leadership for many African American women. Historically, they have chosen to lead from a spiritual perspective and have relied on the biblical principles as a reference to guide their moral judgments and perceptions. As referred to in Proverbs 31, an African American women situated in the Black womanist perspective, we aspire to be the virtuous woman who is valued as a leader, mother, daughter, and sister, whose value is greater than fine jewels.

Leadership requirements can sometimes exceed our expectations. Moses felt insufficient in his assignment to lead the Israelites out of Israel (Exodus 3: 10-12). Moses demonstrated how leaders can do things they do not think they have the strength to do. I have had the blessed experience of being present in the final stages of life for many people. It is the kind of thing one experiences as the wife of a pastor. If it were more simple than complex, I would have the easiest of lives instead of a myriad of

experiences as a daughter, wife, and mother, daughter-in-law, mentor, and co-pastor. I have had to anchor myself in my reliance of Jesus as a source of renewal by reflecting on I John 4:4.

There was never any indication that I would embody this life experience as a Black woman, primarily because I never viewed myself as a full grown Black woman when it came to my relationships with my mother and mother-in-law. In fact, I spent a significant amount of time viewing myself as a child, a grown child and a young wife attempting to live a grown-up life. As a religious leader and educator, I have found that the spiritual aspect of who I am definitely influences who I am and how and why I make the decisions that I do. Just as my life experiences have shaped the woman I have become so have my religious convictions coupled with my rearing.

African American Women and Black Womanist Theology

Woman, Mother, -your responsibility is one that might make angels tremble and fear to take hold! To trifle with it, to ignore error misuse it, is to treat lightly the most sacred and solemn trust ever confided by God to human kind. The training of children is a task on which infinity of weal or woe depends. -Anna Julia Cooper, 1886

Historically, African American women are seen as the matriarch and backbone of the African American community, mastering the complex roles as woman and mother as well as daughter, friend, sibling, and mentor. However, her most prevalent role, and perhaps the most visible of these roles, with regard to education, is that of a parent. The Black womanist genre offers cultural and spiritual themes that are rich resources for

understanding and community and African American women (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Walker, 1984; Yancy, 2008). These resources reveal the plight and struggle with the perceptions of society such the Black woman being categorized as jezebels, maids, mammies, and strong-willed (Yancy, 2008) and the pain associated with their identity issues as well as spiritual patterns offer a prolific view into strategies that successfully engage them in the area of education (Cummings & Latta, 2010; Williams & Frame, 1999).

Alice Walker (1984) is credited with offering a compilation of thought provoking literary work that is thought to have inspired the theory behind Black Womanist Theology (Sanders, 1996). In “In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens,” Walker offers the following definition:

Womanist: From womanish (Opp. of “girlish” i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children, “You acting womanish,” i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered “good” for one. Interested in grown-up doings. Acting grown up. Being grown up. Interchangeable with another black folk expression: “You trying to be grown.” Responsible. In charge. *Serious*. (p. xi)

As depicted by Walker (1984), African American women’s experiences are grounded in culture, which can be linked to their experiences in the Black church (Cummings & Latta, 2010; Sanders, 1996; Williams & Frame, 1999). The African

American woman has been a central place in the legacy of Black culture, through the fusion of storytelling and lived experiences that can be considered thematic and chalked full of culturally rich traditions and practices. This legacy encompasses their experiences based on gender and race. The relevancy of this is an impetus to conceptualizing the positionality and influence of the African American woman as a mother and her impact on her children and how she instills the importance of education and moral responsibility (Cooper, 1998; Cummings & Latta, 2010; Sanders, 1996; Walker, 1984; Williams & Frame, 1999).

Feminist perspectives and multicultural perspectives offer limited viewpoints that do not go beyond the scope of Western paradigms. Feminist perspectives focus on issues of gender and are void of the race component. The multicultural perspective focuses on race and ethnicity but negates the gender component. Both perspectives fail to engage the holistic aspect of African American women and the impact of race and gender in totality. Womanism is standpoint epistemology (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002). Womanism also seeks to conceptualize the moral agency in addition to the identity of race and gender.

Although African American women are known for their strength and courage, there is scarce linkage to the voice of strong women of the past with strong women of today. The life history of Black women in the struggle for equality, social justice, and a better life still resonates in the Black community however, African American women are currently searching to find their own voices in education, in community, and in leadership (Cummings & Latta, 2010; Murtadha & Watts, 2005; Yancy, 2008).

There is no shortage of literature on Black feminism; however, there is limited research on Black feminism from a strength perspective. There is also much literature on African American leadership; however, there is a limited literature that focuses on mothering from a strength perspective as influenced by spiritual beliefs. As a researcher, I have sought to get a better understanding of why spirituality has played such a large role in my own mothering and leadership.

The Importance of African American Education

Although, we have progressed past the era of segregation, in recent years the re-surfacing segregated based socio-economic status has caused a divide between urban and suburban schools. As the U.S. becomes more diverse and the demographics continue to shift from a predominately White population compared to the population growth of African Americans, Latino Americans, and Asian Americans, educational leaders are faced with changes in school populations at the state and local levels.

Brown v. Board of Education

In the 1954 case of *Brown v. Board of Education*, Jim Crow laws that governed the nation and the access to public education for children of color were overturned and segregated schools were deemed unconstitutional. It has been 60 years since the *Brown* decision, so to reflectively look back at the *Brown* decision offers educational leaders a chance to view the progress that has been made since then in our educational system. The impact of this decision still resonates in schools in the Deep South, even within the schools of Texas. According to Smith (1999):

Despite gross inequalities *Brown* was decided on the premise that “separate but equal is inherently unequal.” When in fact mere separation was not the issue; segregation was. Segregation was one then; separation was another; and inequality yet was another. (p. 15)

The compilation of 50th anniversary editorials insinuates little change in the progress made since desegregation. Bell (2004) asserted that 50 years after desegregation, schools were still segregated by color with 80% of White students attending predominantly White schools, while Blacks and Latinos attended schools with mediocre resources. As we mark the 60th anniversary, more recent editorials written this year, also cite little change in progress since the *Brown* decision. In fact, several editorials cite a call to stop the re-segregating of schools that based on socio-economic status and race.

By understanding the impact of *Brown*, the historical perspective is used to contextualize the state of education for African American learners, particularly African American children prior to and following the *Brown* decision, as described in the post-*Brown* era. The *Brown* decision offered the U.S. a chance to be featured on a global platform with regard to overcoming social issues of race and education. However, as a nation, we have not progressed far enough to keep up with demographic changes of the nation. We must not forget the intent of the decision was to give an all children equal access to a quality education.

This year also marked the 50th anniversary of the Civil Rights Act. The *Brown* decision opened the door to force the government to recognize the social injustice suffered by Blacks. The Civil Rights Act profoundly changed the U.S. by giving

opportunities to African Americans and abolishing discrimination in business and public areas based on race, color, religion, sex, and natural origin. This year much of the publicity surrounding the anniversary was placed on Lyndon B. Johnson signing the bill into law. The focus on Johnson seemed to deflect away from the national narrative on race despite the harsh reality of discrimination and racism that has been at our nation's forefront to the election of President Barak Obama in 2008. Certainly, many who fought for social justice during the Civil Rights Movement never thought they would see the day when our nation would have a Black president. I have heard this repeatedly since his inauguration from people of color. Our nation has come a long way since the election of 2008; however, we have a long way to go in changing the narrative of race in our country.

President Obama is seeking to change the narrative, earlier this year he unveiled his education initiative My Brother's Keeper. He cites the growing need to offer more support and hope to young men of color in the U.S. The president called on private donors to fund an initiative to provide greater opportunities to African American and Latino males. Because this is a new initiative, there is little research available on the topic. Donors have pledged \$150 million and another \$200 million over the next five years. The focus of young men of color by an African American man of the presidency is unparalleled in our nation's history.

National Perspective on Education

This issue of race continues to permeate the through the fibers of our educational quilt called the educational system, by which we seek to somehow re-structure, re-build,

or to re-define what educational leadership looks in today's schools. The principal practices found in previous years, are no longer adequate in their applicability in 21st century schools in the U.S. (Dillard, 1995; McCray et al., 2007). School administrators are faced with changing demographics and their student populations are reflective of these changes (Dillard, 1995; Haar & Robicheau, 2009).

The demand for education reform has placed a burden on schools and has facilitated a quest for good leadership and quality learning. The critical challenges faced by school leaders are to ascertain how to confront issues of race, equity, and cultural responsiveness. The traditional leadership role for school principals has changed (Dufour, 2002; Fennell, 2005; Leech & Fulton, 2008; Marks & Printy, 2003). Research founded from an African American perspective is critical to understanding the culture and community of African American students (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003). Furthermore, the need is paramount that school leadership be viewed from a broader and more diverse perspective (Dillard, 1995; Fennell, 2005; Marks & Printy, 2003). There is limited research available on African American female leadership (Berry, 2008; Loder, 2005). Because African American women in education are increasingly interested in leadership roles in high-needs school populations, more research is needed to analyze the successful practices of other African American female principals (Berry, 2008; Dillard, 1995; Loder, 2005).

African American students have encountered gaps in achievement over time (Anderson, 2007). The historical context of the plight of African American children offers an overview on how disparities in academia have manifested over time for these

students and educational leaders as well. African American students have made modest gains following the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954 (McCray et al., 2007). In fact, the research shows a significant gap in tests scores and advanced placement levels between African American students and their White counterparts (Anderson, 2007). African American learners are systemically underrepresented in advanced placement courses, gift and talented programs, and overrepresented in special education classes (Webb-Johnson, 2002). The same is true when it comes to the low percentages of African American students taking college entrance exams and advance placement exams. Thus, the marginalization of African American students through the actions of educational leaders has become a pervasive issue of concern when correlated with the relationship between principal leadership practices and positive learner outcomes in the urban setting.

Students of color are held back by assumptions from achieving a fair and equitable education (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004). Historically, the African American student was viewed as having low intellect and below average achievement levels (Collins & Butler 2007). Consequently, this created a system of underachievement for children of color which presumably included African American females, who became marginalized through actions of educators and the use of standardized tests with low expectations for achievement on these tests (Blanchett et al., 2005).

According to Anderson (2007), African American students' outcomes on college entrance exams have not demonstrated convincing transformations in the last decade. In fact, African American students are more likely to be educated in urban areas with

low socio-economic populations (Anderson, 2007; Ladson Billings, 1998).

Additionally, Anderson cites:

The percentage of high school seniors taking the SAT hovered around 33 percent in 1970 and reached 46 percent in 2000. Despite the some fluctuation over time, the average scores of American twelfth graders are underachieving in a global perspective when compared to other countries. African American students continue to lag behind their counterparts in college entrance exams and advanced placement exams. (Anderson, 2007)

Schools are compelled to produce students who can successfully complete education requirements at the post-secondary level. As quoted by Loder (2005):

Recent discussions on the leadership challenges and problems that urban principals confront are woefully lacking in their consideration of the social and historical contexts of contemporary urban school leadership. The context of urban school leadership has changed dramatically since the Civil Rights struggles to achieve educational equity during the 1950s and 1960s. As their student bodies become more ethically and economically diverse... (p. 298-299)

In order to understand the roles and responsibilities of educational leaders from a national context in public schools, it is imperative to note that schools are growing more diverse and this diversity requires that school districts meet the challenges through the inclusion of culture and race within student populations and the within the professional community of school administration. Moreover, we can no longer afford to ignore the need for more African American women in leadership roles (Haar & Robicheau, 2009).

The outcomes of student academic achievement are paramount to the success of urban schools.

Racial and ethnic socialization encompasses parents sharing their own cultural background contextually in a diverse society. This type of parenting is commonplace in the Black community and the epitome of the way the role of the African American mother is most felt by her children and the community at large. Although it is ideal to note that the parental involvement is a beneficial component to student success; it is just as important to further understand the role of the African American woman in fostering success in student achievement. Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002) offers an epistemological perspective based on the experiences of Black women and their role as caring Black womanists in education. Furthermore, Beauboeuf -Lafontant asserts that educators are being called to address the lack of caring in our schools and the need for transformation of our schools through leadership that can relate to faculty and student populations of the 21st century. It is this perspective that demonstrates the need for educational leaders to better understand the culture and parenting style of African American mothers and their role in the school and community.

State Perspective on Education

In 2001, No Child Left Behind was enacted to address the growing deficit between subpopulations in public schools, especially the achievement gap between White students and students of color (Henry, 2011). The student population in Texas schools reflects the national trend of changing diversity.

Over the last two years, Texas has shown an increase in the student graduation rates in the state. The data cited in the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS, 2011) report shows that Texas schools served over four million students in the 2011-2012 year. The data reported in AEIS (2011) report offered a comparison of graduation rates by subpopulations. This information is delineated and compared to the overall national graduation rate. According to the data, Texas students graduated at higher rate on the state level than students at the national level.

The graduation rates for reported by subpopulations offers a more accurate description of how students of color fared at the state level when compared to other students of color nationally. When compared to White students, African American students' graduation rates lagged behind their White counterparts at both nation and state levels. Earlier in 2014, the Texas State Board of Education made changes to the state graduation requirements by giving students seven educational pathways to graduation. The goal of the law is to give students choice when choosing their educational goals. Since the law was newly enacted, there is limited information on the topic. The most updated information is located in on the Texas Education Association (TEA) website and in editorials. Critics of this law assert concerns of possible decreases in rigor for students on the pathway to college. The plan includes a reduction in mathematics courses beyond Algebra II. It is believed that students have been shown to perform more successfully in Algebra II than the other mathematic classes in high school. Additionally, proponents for the change cited that students needed less history credits to complete graduation requirements. The recent graduation requirements will sorely affect

the paths for many African American students. Students will be less compelled to choose a rigorous college without mentoring and parental guidance.

Since African American students are continuing to lag behind their White counterparts, graduation requirements are can be a deterrent for African American student enrollment in advanced placement and dual credit courses and the critical regard needed to promote academic success in higher education.

Local Perspective on Education

One of the most prevalent issues local school districts are facing in Texas is the impact of immigration on student enrollment. There is a growing concern about taxpayers funding the education of illegal immigrants. While NCLB (2001) can foster opportunities for academic for growth for students, according to Capps et al. (2005), children of color and new immigrants can become discouraged by low performance on standardized tests. Moreover, when schools place an emphasis on test scores, it causes a narrowing of instructional focus in order to meet school performance targets (Capps et al., 2005).

While immigration is a pertinent issue for Texas schools so is the plight of the African American learner. Not only is achievement an issue for achievement gaps for African American students and White students, African American students are now lagging behind the graduation rates of White and Latino students (AEIS, 2011-2012). However, when referring to the achievement gap, African American and Latino students are often placed in the same category (Slavin & Madden, 2006). Therefore, the research comparing the two subpopulations is limited. Most often in state data, African American

and Latino student performance is compared to White student performance on state-based standardized testing (Ford & Helms, 2012).

Although NCLB (2001) was designed to close the achievement gap upon adoption, local school districts have maintained a decline in mathematics and reading scores for African Americans (Thompson & Allen, 2012). According the Thompson and Allen (2012), high staking testing has led to a skewed perception of the perfect school based primarily on test scores, which has caused local school districts to make administrative leadership changes as well as policy changes to accommodate the thrust to raise test scores, hereby, leaving the intent of focusing on closing the achievement gap (NAES, 2001).

School districts are compelled to meet annual yearly progress standards (AYP) at the local levels in order to receive state and federal funding for schools (Baker, 2011). AYP is used as a diagnostic measurement tool to determine how well a school performed based on student progress on the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) test. The STAAR test replaced the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) in 2013.

While the recent changes in graduation requirements are meant to address dropout rates in the state of Texas, the issues of program funding for drop out recovery programs, which impacts the individual, social, and family-based causes that can lead to high dropout rates for students of color (Koepke et al., 2011). While dropout rates for Texas has begun to decline for the state, they have given local schools a false sense of security with regard to the monies needed to continue decreasing the dropout rates for

children of color. Koepke et al. (2011) imply that emphasizing AYP results has put pressure on schools and caused them to allocate school funding to support programs that are more instructionally-focused based on test scores, rather than drop out recovery. When AYP standards are not met, school funding is jeopardized.

Local school districts are challenged with the recent changes in state testing, graduation requirements, and ever increasing student populations. Local schools are combated with diverse student populations with academic and social needs. According to Lewis et al. (2008), urban school districts must examine the way funding for resources are allocated with regard to urban schools and African American student achievement.

Perspective of the Black Church and Women in the Ministry

The Black church has long been considered the prominent institution in the Black community. It is considered by many to be the beacon, the light, and the spiritual hospital for Black people in general. For generations, the spiritual aspect of church has given African Americans a sense of identity and a foundation of kindredness with other African Americans across the nation. Whether at a church, on the radio, or on the television, you can see the evidence of what brings the Black community together with one central focus, the love of God and true acceptance among people who are similar in color and beliefs.

The Black church is considered an institution because it has been a constant pillar for African Americans dating back to times of slavery. The biblical doctrine of beliefs concerning God, Christ, love, and humanity has grounded the core beliefs of the denominations of the Black church. Blacks relied on their spirituality to get them

through the brutality of slavery. In the 20th century, many African Americans were converted to Christianity through Baptist and Methodist revivals (Sherkat, 2002).

Sherkat (2002) states:

A variety of African-American sectarian groups arose from the nondenominational storefront churches of the early 20th century. Over time, nondenominational African-American congregations linked to Church of God in Christ. (p. #)

Although Black churches exercised a unified belief concerning the Bible as their foundation for their beliefs their support of women in the ministry was severely lacking. The role of clergy began to change over time, while the various denominations held to their own beliefs concerning women in the ministry. Male-headed congregations are typical of most Black churches. Male pastors are regarded as the authority on God's word and often lead their congregations from a maculated perspective. The positioning of the male is often one of authority while the female role is often placed under male authority. Furthermore, women are often rejected in church leadership roles, especially in a pastoral role (Hye-cheon & Yeary, 2011).

Historically, women have been excluded from the most of the Black church denominations, until 1894 when the African Methodist Episcopal Zion became the first denomination to ordain a woman named Julia Foote. Following Foote's ordination and years of discrimination, several Black women left the various denominations to form their own denomination that promoted women as pastors and spiritual leaders (Lyons, 2013). Lyons (2013) further postulates that Black women continued to minister despite

further discrimination from other Black denominations, lower wages, and fewer opportunities for educational and professional advancement when compared to Black men and their White counterparts.

Lyons (2013) conducted a study of three Baptist African American female pastors in ministry. She posits that even though church denominations are more accepting of women in the ministry, the Baptist denomination leaves ordination to local churches for them to decide on whether or not to ordain a woman into the role of minister and pastor. Moreover, Lyons asserts that because this is left to local churches to decide, many of the women have come to be viewed as a threat to the reverence and respect given to the ministerial office of pastoring. Other Black denominations are less accepting of women in pastoral role of ministry. The Church of God in Christ and other denominations have become more tolerant of women in ministry from the ministerial and mission role however, there is still intolerance for women in the role of a pastor (Hye-cheon & Yeary, 2011; Lyons, 2013). As a result, African American women in the ministry are still challenged with discrimination with regard to race, gender, and class. This type of discrimination still promotes the exclusivity of the spiritual position of ministers in the Black church. Having worked in ministry in the Baptist and Church of God in Christ denominations, I have encountered this type of discrimination. I was allowed to work beside my husband but never in the pastoral position. I could lead various auxiliaries but never rival the dominant male role in ministry. In fact, I was most often taught to remain in a subservient role as a church worker, given to looking the part of a pastor's wife.

Modern Church Perspective and Women in the Ministry

While the Black church remains the dominant institution in the Black community, the demographical changes in the U.S. have caused a shift to churches that are more culturally diverse. Historically, pastors relied on the group identification of the Black community to feed into the membership enrollment in the local church. However, African Americans are becoming more advanced educationally and professionally and as such, they have begun moving out of urban areas to the suburbs. Moving to the suburbs created changes in socio-economic status, neighborhood stratification, and worship opportunities. Small storefront churches have lost their small town images and changed to more upscale, techno-savvy worship centers with a modern flare. Churches now embrace the shared role of husband and wife pastoral teams. Pastoral teams have become a new concept for ministry by merging the male and female perspectives on teaching and leadership. This concept is one that my husband and I used with our church in our community. We moved from a rural church setting with the intent of changing our leadership style to a more inclusive style of ministry. We also wanted to move away from pastoring from a rural Black church setting to a suburban diverse congregation. We strategically chose our leadership team to include those who would help to promote diversity as a model concept for church building. The mega church has changed the landscape of church planning.

With congregations that boast of tens of thousands of members, the mega church movement has become the new impetus for social change, mission focus, and religious renewal (Gramby-Sobukwe & Holland, 2009). In essence, it is church done a new way,

shifting the focus away from the divisions of race and religion to inclusion and acceptance. According to Gramby-Sobukwe and Holland (2009), since 1981 mega churches have changed the face of churches in the U.S. With a senior pastor at the helm, many of the mega churches include a married couple that share the responsibility for ministry through local and international outreach, counseling, and other community involvement. Pastor Rick Warren, of the Saddleback Church, was the first to introduce this concept in North America. Since introduction of his book *The Purpose Driven Church* in 1995, many pastors have adopted the concept of making church attendance about something more than a religious duty.

We bought into the concept of changing the way we do church. When we founded our church, my husband and I decided it would be centered on shared leadership with me as the co-pastor. This was significantly different from any role I held at either of our two previous churches. I was used to being the Bible study and Sunday school teacher. Under the new model I would be responsible for the curriculum and spiritual guidance along with my husband. There was no longer the division of thought on what was ethical about church leadership. We were determined to present a united front by growing the church together in ministry. It was no longer about legalism and church protocol but rather, it was about servant leadership and teaching God's word through love for humanity.

The position and role of the Black church still holds its place in the Black community. Although the mega church concept is on the rise, rural areas and traditional religious observations are still more prevalent in the Black community. The role of the

woman in ministry has changed over time as women have become more influential socially. This is evidenced in non-traditional churches as women take on greater leadership roles in ministry.

African American Women Leadership and the Strength Perspective

As an educational leader, I have sought to learn more about African American women in school leadership. Although there is limited research on African American females in leadership roles other than principals, I decided to look at African American female principals and how spirituality influences their leadership.

There is limited research on strength-based perspectives in dealing with students from a cultural perspective. There is gap in the literature with regard to understanding the role of mothering from an African American woman's leadership as posited from a strength-based perspective. By understanding the lived histories and trajectory of two African American female educators, it is my intent to add to the body of literature on strength-based leadership in educational administration. This perspective offers a view of their strength and resiliency as women, mothers, and leaders in educational administration.

Educators must move in the direction towards a strength-based approach of educational leadership when working with African American students. Educational leadership must make the paradigm shift to a strength emphasis. The strength-based model offers a positive perspective for the use of the strength-based approach when working with at-risk youth. According to the research, the strength-based approach is

suited for recognizing students' strengths as basic intervention (Bowman, 2006; Smith, 2006).

Bowman (2006) asserts a need for further research based on brand new construct where strength-based leadership is emphasized. Moreover, Smith (2006) asserts the need for a new construct when it comes to the strength perspective and old paradigms that offer limited research when associating a strength-based approach to understanding culture and student behavior. According to Smith (2006):

The strength approach to counseling posits that communities with a strong sense of positive ethnic identity and strong bonding among its members protect youth from many risk factors (such as drug abuse and violence) to which they may be exposed. This approach emphasizes the importance of using ethnic and cultural rituals to provide healing contexts for individuals. (p. #)

Although Smith argues for a broadening of the strength perspective for counseling, the same argument can be posed with regard to the positive contribution the strength approach suggests for building strong ethnic identities for educational leadership, as well as our students and their families.

There is limited research available on African American female leadership (Berry, 2008; Loder, 2005). For many African American women, their leadership practices are shaped by their culture, spirituality, training, and their lived experiences (Dillard, 1995; Fennell, 2005). According to the research, a correlation exists between African American women seeing their role through their lived experiences and the

credence of nurturing and care giving as their means to assist in the development the African American learner (Dillard, 1995; Loder, 2005). The research suggests that African American women have historically contributed to the shouldering of the education dilemmas confronted by the urban schools and communities. The burden of this responsibility for African American school administrator requires them to accept the responsibility for educating and nurturing the students from low socio-economic households in urban communities, responsibilities that differ considerably from their male and White female counterparts (Dillard, 1995; Alston, 2000; Loder, 2005).

Research also indicates that the success of public school requires that the quality of the education for African American students in the urban setting is at risk and in order to address these concerns, it is essential that educational leadership becomes a better representative of their diverse school population (Dillard, 1995; Fennell, 2005; Haar & Robicheau, 2009; Howard, 2011; Webb-Johnson, 2002, 2004; Young, Madsen, & Young, 2010), and this change in leadership perception has moved from the traditional leadership role for school principals (Dufour, 2002; Fennell, 2005; Leech & Fulton, 2008; Marks & Printy, 2003). Furthermore, the need is paramount that school leadership be viewed from a broader and more diverse perspective (Dillard, 1995; Fennell, 2005; Marks & Printy, 2003). Transformational leadership fosters change by radically transforming schools through social justice and democracy (Dantley, 2003; Normore & Jean-Marie, 2007). Social justice issues then become channels linking the school to realities of the African American community. Because African American female principals can relate to the social justice issues of the Black community, they are able to

communicate and lead with a level of empathy and compassion. This also becomes an opportunity for her to use spirituality in her leadership.

The demographic patterns in urban schools show an increase in diverse student populations, which are comprised of growth among students of color from families of low-socioeconomic status (Anderson, 2007; Dantley, 2005). Marks and Printy (2003) assert student academic performance can be improved by expanding school leadership. According to Anderson (2007) achievement and test score gaps persist for students of color in urban areas. Given the disproportionality among students of color who are overrepresented in special education and underrepresentation in gifted and talented programs (James et al., 2008; Skiba et al., 2006; Waitoller & Cheney, 2010), these students can identify with practices of leadership situated among African American perspectives (Dantley, 2005). Research cited from perspectives of African American female secondary principals facilitates examination of the premises under which these principals operate. Further, according to Dantley (2003), African American leaders must move beyond transformational leadership to using a critical lens to apply their natural use of spirituality to their leadership practices.

Research from the African American perspectives is considered an unlikely source of viability (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003), and there is limited research available posited on the premise of applying critical spirituality in the secondary education among African American females in the research (Berry, 2008; Loder, 2005). According to this limited research, African American females in education are increasingly interested in leadership roles in high-needs school populations. More research is needed to analyze

the successful practices of other African American female principals (Berry, 2008; Alston, 2000; Dillard, 1995; Loder, 2005), especially those who vary their role as servant leader, advocate, or social change agent (Dantley, 2003; Fry, 2003). The intent of this study is to analyze the impact of critical spirituality on the leadership practices of African American females in leadership.

In the post World War II era, the federal government was concerned with the progress of Americans and what was perceived as lagging behind when compared to other countries. There was a great thrust to have the U.S. improve its education system in order to compete with the global market. According to Alston (2005) teaching was one of the leading professions for Black women in the 1920s. At this time, Black women were working as teachers and school administrators in schools that they both opened and maintained. Subsequently, the college educated Black women were sent to rural areas to improve instruction in schools (Alston, 2005; Alston, 2000). African American history is being lost or diluted by present day demands of 21st century schools. Social progression has moved us further from our past history in an attempt to promote an educational system that is more technologically savvy and ethnically conscience to the detriment of social relevance for African Americans and their connection to their past. The purpose of this paper is to offer a historical perspective of African American women and their impact on past and present issues concerning education through social activism and service. Furthermore, this study examined the impact of the African American woman's perspective on mothering, spirituality, and strength.

The historical viewpoint demonstrates the cultural relevance and the value of education from the African American school leadership perspective. According to McCray, Wright, and Beachum (2007), the landmark case of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) changed the landscape of education. Although the change was slow over the next twenty years, it required that schools be desegregated and that all students receive an adequate education (McCray et al., 2007). Schools were faced with changing demographics (Blanchett et al., 2005; Haar & Robicheau, 2009; McCray et al., 2007).

African American females undertook leadership roles as post-*Brown* principals; this ruling changed the complexion of many U.S. schools. The progress of desegregation prompted a decline in African American principals. According to McCray et al. (2007) during the integration process most African American principals lost their jobs to White administrators, causing a significant decline in African American principals in elementary and secondary schools. Following desegregation, the number of African American teachers and administrators began to grow. However, according to Alston (2005), the number of African American females was significantly behind their White counterparts. In order to demonstrate the relevance for the growing need for more African American female principals, it is important to examine the causal incentives, which insightfully demonstrates this growing need for more African Americans in educational leadership. According to the research, African American females often lead schools under some of the most adverse of circumstances (Tillman, 2004).

African American female principals often experience their initial obstacles by simply obtaining a leadership appointment by a superintendent. School district

superintendents tend to appoint African American female principals to high-needs schools with low performance and low socio economic areas (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003). Research cited that once they have taken on the leadership of a school they are judged based on their treatment and of other people of color and the aesthetic appearance of their school (Haar & Robicheau, 2009). Furthermore, Haar and Robicheau (2009) implied it is more difficult to recruit African American females in educational leadership because they are more attracted to other fields of study.

The notion that African American principals can only lead in schools that are predominantly African American and that Whites can lead in school that more diverse, has led to a disparity in the representation and occupation of principalship positions by African American women (McCray et al., 2007). Haar and Robicheau (2009) implied that we can no longer afford to ignore the effects of race and gender on leadership as student populations become more diverse, school leadership remains predominantly White (McCray et al., 2007; Tillman, 2004). Moreover, Tillman (2004) asserts that in the field of educational administration, African American principals are still underrepresented. Thus, it is implied that African American women are also factored into this underrepresentation within the ranks of principalship (McCray et al., 2007; Tillman, 2004). The role of the principal is vital in the educating of our students (Cooley & Shen, 2000; McCray et al., 2007; Tillman, 2004).

For many African American female principals, their leadership practices are shaped by their culture, spirituality, training, and their lived experiences (Dillard, 1995; Fennell, 2005). The research suggested a correlation between how African American

women see their role through their lived experiences and the credence of nurturing and care giving as their means to assist in the development of children (Case, 1997; Dillard, 1995; Loder, 2005). The research suggests that African American women have historically contributed to the shouldering of the education dilemmas confronted by urban schools and communities. The burden of this responsibility required them to accept the responsibility for educating and nurturing the children from low socio-economic households in the urban communities, responsibilities that differ considerably from their male and While female counterparts (Dillard, 1995; Loder, 2005).

According to the research, African American female principals are under-valued and are often included the general category of female leadership. It is important to note that although African American females are feminine in style, their differences are often misinterpreted as inferior and deficient in leadership ability (Kruger, 2008). As discussed in the research, African American females often feel they have the constant need to be aware of being critiqued primarily because of their race (Haar & Robicheau, 2008). Educational leaders must move beyond the limitations of race and gender to permeate the educational administration system (Haar & Robicheau, 2008; Kruger, 2008; McCray et al., 2007).

The lives of Anna Julia Cooper and Mary McCleod Bethune offer a historical viewpoint of two African American females who left an indelible mark in educational leadership and in African American female leadership.

Anna Julia Cooper

For many, education was the vehicle by which many sought to escape the confines of demoralization and servitude (Cooper, 1998; Walker, 1983).

Only the BLACK WOMAN can say “when and where I enter in the quiet undisputed dignity of my womanhood, without violence and without suing or special patronage, then and there the whole Negro race enters with me. (Cooper, 1998, p. 59)

Anna Julia Haywood was born a slave in 1858 in North Carolina. She was born to an enslaved Black woman and her biological father, who was also their White master (Bailey, 2004). For this reason, she never felt she owed her father. Although she grew up in a time of significant challenges, Anna believed her life to be a calling and consequently never viewed herself as poor by any means. At the time, the education of the Black woman was given little regard; however, she did not let that deter her from taking advantage of a scholarship from St. Augustine’s School early in her life. She worked as a tutor and a teacher during her time at St. Augustine.

Bailey (2004) offers that Anna Julia understood her good fortune, which is why she was attentive to the needs of the poor, and became known as a solitary voice for those who did not possess her culture that she epitomized as an educated Black woman. In fact, Anna Julia was deeply religious and thusly lived with the conviction that her life was a calling and that any and all suffering in life became a matter of choice by the individual. (Cooper, 1998). She used her voice as a singular solitary voice, though quiet, to gain recognition in her time. Anna Julia attended Oberlin College, where she studied

Greek, Latin, and advanced mathematics. She later married George Cooper, a young minister. They were only married for two years when her husband became ill and died. Anna Cooper was cognizant of her good fortune despite her being born into slavery. The death of her husband and living with economic risk, demonstrating great resilience, she went on to pursue her education. Despite no financial means and the abandonment of her friends, Annie Cooper went on to become a teacher.

Cooper returned to Oberlin College and earned a master's degree. She also taught in Ohio, North Carolina, and Washington D.C. She spent the majority of her teaching career teaching in Washington D.C., where she also adopted and raised seven children from relatives who could not care for them. She placed great value on education. She spent many years promoting the education of youth in the African American community. She stated, "Education, then, is the safest and richest investment possible" (Cooper, 1998/1892, p. 168). Cooper also believed that African American youth could achieve more in society through educating themselves.

Anna Julia Cooper was a valiant Black woman who has left an indelible mark on the struggle of African American women in education, the feminist movement, and most importantly in what is now recognized as Black Womanist Theology (Cooper, 1998). According to research, Cooper was not dissuaded by discrimination nor was she afraid to stand up for her convictions. She mothered, taught, and crusaded on behalf of African American learners and their right to an equitable education (Cooper, 1998; May, 2007). Cooper worked as school administrator as well as a critical literary scholar. She not only demonstrated the qualities of a leader who serves but, she was just as persistent in

contributing contextually to changing the landscape of educational opportunities for African American children and women (Alston, 2005; May, 2007). Cooper used her voice to wage a stark analysis of the politics of race, gender, and politics (May, 2007) hoping to encourage change in her world.

Cooper was challenged by the peril of being an educated Black woman during a time when Black women were not revered in education. Anna Julia Cooper was born into slavery and lived during times when societal norms dictated differences by race and social class. Cooper is most noted for her literary accomplishments however, much of her scholarship has gone under-recognized in Black feminist scholarship (Lemert, 1998). According to Lemert (1998) Cooper was a woman who was known for her heroic dignity because she refused to live as others thought she should. Because her literary style was so elegant, she was often mistaken for a White woman. This misconception caused her works to be contextually misconstrued with ambiguity and is the reason why much of her works are viewed in isolation. However, it is this isolation that offers the adaptation of her voice as a Black feminist. As an emerging Black womanist, I think Cooper's trajectory is important as it offers a strong correlation to the Black feminist finding voice.

Cooper was caught between the differences between her colleagues Booker T. Washington and his belief in achievement through training Black youth through trade schools, and WEB DuBois with his belief in acquisition of education through schools and colleges. Holding firm to her own beliefs, she remained focused on promoting the educational pursuits for Black women. She devoted her life to writing about the causes

of Black women. Although she was not always forthright in her comparisons of Black and White women, the tone of writings became known as a juxtaposed argument of social injustice faced by Black women. She encouraged Black women to educate themselves in order to become known as just as intelligent if not more than White women (Bailey, 2004; Cooper, 1892/1998; McCluskey, 1989). Anna Julia Cooper's life story and philosophy are just as important as her contributions to writing and speeches (Bailey, 2004).

Mary McLeod Bethune

Truly, my worldly possessions are few. Yet, my experiences have been rich. From them, I have distilled principles and policies in which I believe firmly, for they represent the meaning of my life's work. (Bethune, 1973, p. 85)

Although Mary McLeod Bethune is easily one of the most famous African American female education pioneers, there is limited research on her impact on education. However, the research offers that Bethune contributed to the African American community by extending voice to African American women. According to McCluskey (1989), she attributed her principles to the belief that African American women deserved more recognition in society. Bethune tailored her leadership style to fit her roles within the community and among African American women as well as herself. She shared her leadership philosophy with other African American women, whom she deemed to be "self-sacrificing," thereby adding to her theory of domesticity (Barr, 2009; McCluskey, 1989). McLeod was often misunderstood for her beliefs because of her

stance on making the domestication of Black women an art, which later became known as domestication arts. This approach started her on a pathway to align her with a feminist perspective. For McLeod, her feminist perspective came with the sacrificial cost of her marriage to her husband after opening her school.

Mary Bethune went on to devote her life's work to pushing for the achievement of African American women through education. In 1955, Mary McLeod Bethune offered this reflection of her life:

Despite many crushing burdens and handicaps, I have risen from the cotton fields of South Carolina to found a college, administer it during its years of growth, and become a public servant in the government of our country and a leader of women. (p. #)

The strength of her character can be seen through her retrospective backward glance at all what she had accomplished as a leader and as an African American woman. She continues to linger in her final words written in "My Last Will and Testament" where she left a record of all she hoped to leave as her legacy.

African American Women and Resilience

For many years, African American women have demonstrated their ability to rebound from pain and suffering (Laditka, Murray, & Laditka, 2010). Their resiliency fostered their desires to make it against all odds (Banerjee & Pyle, 2004; Laditka et al., 2010; O'Connor, 2011; Sparks, 1999). I feel like that is one of the factors that has propelled me as a woman seeking to overcome a life of pain.

Laditka et al. (2010) cite research findings that support the notion that attributes of resiliency of African American women are highly adaptive, particularly after experiencing catastrophe. In the study, women who were recovering in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina demonstrated the ability to adapt to a change in location and relationships. According to Laditka et al., their coping strategies were based on the level of opposition and the nature of constraints under which they were challenged. Because many of them were displaced following the hurricane, they were forced to redefine and reinvent their lives. Women in the study showed their resilience by successfully starting their lives over by embracing new cultures, homes, and friends.

According to the research, African American women were not limited in their pursuit of education despite the constraints and risks associated with pursuing a college education, even when they did not receive support from their families and universities (Banerjee & Pyle, 2004; Laditka et al., 2010; O'Connor, 2011; Sparks, 1999). Banerjee and Pyle (2004) conducted a research study that looked at the resilience of African American women on welfare and noted the women credited their ability to overcome adversity to their spiritual beliefs that promoted their self-worth. In fact, the women attributed their courage to pursue their life goals to their desire to apply their religious beliefs to their life situations (Banerjee & Pyle, 2004; Laditka et al., 2010; O'Connor, 2011; Sparks, 1999).

The results of each of these studies each show the ability of the African American woman to rise above her circumstances as she draws on her spiritual beliefs. According to the research, African American women used adversity to increase their

strength and ability to overcome. They applied their beliefs to their daily living, goals and personal pursuits.

Conclusion

By conducting this review of literature, it is the intent of this study to find the correlation between the history of African American education, the role of African American women, and their use of spirituality and strength in their leadership role. The gaps in the literature for African American female leadership and spirituality reveals a need for more contributions of this perspective for women who are seeking to find their voice as strong African American leaders in school administration and in the Black community. Additionally, by looking back at the *Brown* decision and the state of education in the U.S., it allows educational leaders to determine why there is a need for more African American women in leadership roles in our schools. The view of the resiliency of African American women offers a peek into what propels them to overcome. We can see that there is still more work to do following the *Brown* decision to promote the academic success for students of color.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Autoethnography is a qualitative research methodology that utilizes the analysis of personal experiences to understand cultural experience (Denzin, 2000; Ellis et al., 2006; Ellis et al., 2010). The autoethnography is a process (Ellis et al., 2006). According to Ellis et al. (2006), when researchers do autoethnography, they retrospectively and selectively write about epiphanies that stem from or are made possible by being a part of a culture or a particular cultural identity. Furthermore, the autoethnographer uses social science research methods to analyze these experiences. In autoethnography, the tenets of both autobiography and ethnography are used in the research process. The tenets of participant observations, interviews, and the transcript are used to analyze themes. Because ethnography is the study of a culture's relational practices, common practices, values, and beliefs (Atkinson, Coffey & Delamont, 1999; Ellis et al., 2006), the process offers scholars a way to ground research in personal experience, through the telling of stories. This method was used to sensitize the reader to cultural and political issues and thereby allowing readers to identify and empathize with people who are different from them (Denzin, 2000; Ellis et al., 2006).

This qualitative research used autoethnographic methodology, an examination of the author's perspective as the researcher, through a detailed examination of African American women in leadership and mothering, as a subject that has historically, in the context of education and leadership, been overlooked.

Feminist perspectives and multicultural perspectives offer limited viewpoints that do not go beyond the scope of Western paradigms. Feminist perspectives focused on issues of gender are often void of the race component. The multicultural perspective focuses on race and ethnicity but sometimes negates the gender component. Both perspectives fail to engage the holistic aspect of the African American woman and the impact of race and gender in totality. Williams and Frame (1999) stated:

Modes of resistance and themes of empowerment arising from AA woman's experiences include women-centered networks, spiritual bonding, social activism through the ethic of humanity, aglitarianism, and wholeness. (p. 303)

African American women's experiences are grounded in culture (William & Frame, 1999). According to William and Frame (1999), the African American woman has a central place in the legacy of African American culture through the fusion of experiences that can be considered thematic and chalk full of culturally rich traditions and practices. This legacy encompasses their experiences based on gender and race.

Womanist cultural and spiritual themes (Walker, 1984) are rich resources for understanding and communicating with African American women. The struggle with African American women and with their identity issues and spiritual patterns offer prolific views into devising techniques that successfully engage them in the arena of education (Williams & Frame, 1999). Womanism seeks to conceptualize the moral agency in addition to the identity of race and gender.

The Researcher as the Phenomena

The growth in the ethnological studies over recent years has garnered an increase in the use of the researcher as the product, thereby allowing the researcher to include ‘self’ in the research narrative and thusly rendering the use of autoethnography as a viable research method (Bower et al., 2000; Berger, 2001; Bochner & Ellis, 2006; Ellis et al., 2010). The use of personal narrative allows the researcher to examine his or her perspective on their own lived experiences with regard to the research by offering reflections and analysis. The researcher becomes the phenomena. According to Berger (2001), Ellis et al., (2010), and Wall (2006) within autoethnography the author writes from a personal perspective and style and offers reflexivity and voice to a social phenomenon.

Autoethnography is a process of self-discovery through storytelling and it can also be the sharing of someone else’s story. The author writes in retrospect about select past experiences through the use of memories, photographs, and sometimes interviews. The perceived memories are thought to have significantly impacted the biographer’s life and consequently had a profound impact on their life’s trajectory. The lived perspective can be the result of a life crisis or event that is largely characterized by the researcher as transformative and is in fact, their own self-claimed phenomena (Ellis et al., 2006).

Autoethnography as a Research Methodology

As I began to contemplate which style of autoethnography would be best fit my research method, I took consideration that either style would allow me to examine the phenomenon from a multifaceted viewpoint. My query led me to performance,

narrative, and analytical autoethnography methodologies. I am offering a description of each because I had to look to at journal papers, monographs, and reflexive pieces to assist me in my inquiry into the autoethnography research method. At times I found it, as a novice autoethnographer, to be difficult to navigate through the ethnographic research to arrive at any concise measure of ethnical guidance with regard to the autoethnography. This dilemma is addressed in Tolich's (2010) research study on ethnical debates between the genres. One of the debates cited by Tolich is the conflict of ethnical guidance between creative analytical autoethnography and analytical autoethnography, a debate that encourages the use of ethnical consciousness and ethical goals for the researcher to keep in place. Tolich (2010) cautions the novice autoethnographer to utilize ethnical guidelines. He suggests following four guidelines:

- 1) Obtain informed consent from participants in the study.
- 2) Make sure you tell the person's story the way they shared it
- 3) Minimize the risk to the participant and the researcher.
- 4) Assume that those mentioned in the text will one day read it. (p. #)

Research Community

The interviews were conducted at the office of a local church facility. The church facility was selected as the research site because of the location, availability, and accessibility of the building. The facility is located in suburban community. The community is a rural suburb that is a fast growing area with a large school district. The community consists of middle class residential housing, apartments, shopping strips, convenience stores, restaurants, and churches. There is no city government and the most

influential entities are the local school district, the chamber of commerce, and local churches.

Three of the research participants are from a small town 100 miles to the north that neighbors a college town, in fact, it is known as a twin city area. The population is diverse and spans a broad range of socio-economic areas. The participants from this study lived primarily in the working and middle class areas. The town is comprised of local schools, churches, restaurants, small shops, and convenience stores.

The community backgrounds are significant because the participants are deeply rooted in their communities and their perspectives are influenced by their lives in their respective communities. Both communities are situated in close proximity to local colleges in towns where education is in the history of the community.

Purposeful Sampling

For this research study purposeful sampling was used rather than random sampling to select research participants. Purposeful sampling in qualitative research is defined as one in which the researcher selects a population sample based their relevance to the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Coyne, 1997; Cresswell, 1998; Patton, 1999). Participants were selected based on their life experiences and their relevance to the research study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest the use of the naturalistic inquiry method of purposeful sampling as a means for the researcher to use the research questions to assist in the selecting of the participants, which affords the researcher a broadened range of data from a specific focus, which is unattainable through random sampling.

A purposeful sample of young African women with children, strong African American women who were reared by a strong African American women, and African American males who were reared by and married to strong African American women were selected for this study. For this study, strong African American women were defined as women who describe their identities from a strength perspective. Furthermore, the males in this study were selected based on their perception of strength-based mothering and their viewpoint on the trajectory of the researcher.

The research sample of women and men being used for the purpose of this study were located in the suburban community. Some of the participants derived from a local women's small group. The women's small group has approximately 25 members and 8 women were selected from the membership pool. The small group meets to offer inspiration and camaraderie between women. The small group membership is diverse and is made up of Black, Hispanic, and White women.

Eight Black women were selected to participate in this study. Four of these women were selected to participate in each focus group. Participants were chosen based on the criteria relative to the research focus of African American women and mothering from the strength perspective. One group was young mothers, who were currently raising their own children. For the purpose of this study, these women were selected because they were young African American females with small children. This focus group included African American females who had been mothered by an African American female. The second focus group of women were selected because they were African American women who had been mothered by an African American female. The

women in the focus groups each had various levels of education, from high school graduates, to some college, and college graduates.

Additionally, a purposeful sampling came from my own family. They were selected based on their relation to me as the autoethnographer, which evolves my relationship with them as a mother, wife, and daughter. The sample includes my three daughters. They were selected because of their relationship to the researcher and also for their perspective on their emergence into womanhood. My aunts were selected to offer their viewpoints on being raised by a strong African American mother, their relation to my mother, and their sister and their own experiences as a mother in the Black community. They were also selected because they had first-hand knowledge of my journey to the doctorate and premise of my mother's parenting style. My husband was selected because he was raised by a strong African American woman. Additionally, he was also selected to share his perspective on my trajectory as a woman over the last 28 years as well as my pathway to doctorate.

After obtaining consent to participate in the study from all participants, the church administrator was contacted to get permission to use the offices at their facility to conduct the focus groups and interviews. Phone calls were made to each participant prior to the interviews as a reminder of the date, time, and location of the interviews.

Instrumentation

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the use of qualitative research methods comes more easily to the “human-as-a-research instrument” (p. 198). Lincoln and Guba (1985) assert:

We believe that the human will tend, therefore, toward interviewing, observing, mining available documents and records, taking account of nonverbal cues, and interpreting inadvertent unobtrusive measures. (p. 199)

As human instrument referred to by Lincoln and Guba (1985), I am the principal instrument in this study. However, this study also includes, as a primary source, information from the participants in the study and the interpretation of their perceptions about the values, life lessons, parental practices, and the strength of their mothers. I used the naturalistic inquiry interview protocol method to examine the participants’ perceptions of being mothered by an African American mother and their interpretation of the parenting structure of their home as a child. Other topics were permitted for interpretive purposes during the interview. In order to minimize one word responses or redundancy in responses, open-ended questions were used during the interviews. Although the questions were pre-formatted, participants were encouraged to use a conversational style to answer the open-ended questions. This style allowed to me to ask questions that naturally arose from information shared during the course of the interview process. The interview protocol was designed to allow the questioning to focus on the three main issues of: 1) importance of education, 2) role of mothers, and 3) social value systems and the influence on student achievement and student success.

In each interview, participants were asked to reflect on their childhood and to offer their perceptions of their mother's parenting style and influence on their education. They were asked to identify and interpret mothering characteristics and qualities. The mother participants were asked to interpret their own mothering characteristics and qualities, as well as that of their mothers. The women who were mothered by an African American mother were asked to interpret the mothering characteristics and qualities of their mothers. Two male participants were asked to interpret the mothering characteristics and qualities of their wives, mothers, and daughters. The interviews were conducted at a nonaligned site in the community, which provided a level of comfort and ease for dialogue. I conducted each focus group discussion as two to four hours interview sessions. I also conducted individual interviews for those not included in the focus groups for one-two hours.

Handwritten notes were taken during the interviews. Note-taking during the interview allowed me to make notes concerning information I found to be insightful or information for which I wanted further clarity. Interviews were recorded on a digital recorder. The digital recorder made the interview process easier for accuracy in documentation. The ability to replay the interviews and to align my notes with the interview assisted in filling gaps in my handwritten notes and it also allowed me to focus more on the information shared during the interview process without having to rely heavily on memorization of significant details. It also allowed me to hone-in on non-verbal cues such as, word phrasing, voice pitch, and voice inflection during the

interview. Transcription of the interviews was completed by a professional transcription company.

For the purpose of this study, the data collected were comprised of the lived experiences of five young African American mothers in a focus group setting. The focus groups consisted of four women with similar characteristics as young Black women, who were mothers and who had also been reared by an African American female. Participants were asked to focus on their life experiences growing up in the Black community and being raised by an African American woman. Additionally they were asked to share the mothering qualities that were learned from their mothers and that they felt were effective. They were asked to engage in and to share their own self-reflection and interpretation of instilled values.

After receiving permission from the IRB to conduct my research study, I contacted the secretary of the women's small group ministry at a local church to get recommendations on potential research participants. I gave her a copy of my research consent letter to share with the potential candidates. When feedback was received with the consent of the potential participants, I was given their contact information. I contacted each individual by phone and asked for their verbal consent to participate. I distributed consent letters in person. Participants signed their consent letters the day of the interviews, prior to the actual interviews. The participants who were not focus group participants, each signed the participation consent prior to the individual interviews. Once the consent letters were obtained, they were securely filed following the

interviews. The consents have remained securely filed throughout the course of this study.

Focus group participants and out-of-town family members were given a letter asking for voluntary participation in the research study. A follow-up phone call was made to ask for their voluntary participation in the study. Local family members were given a letter asking for voluntary participation in person. I also followed up with each and asked for their voluntary participation in the study.

Data Collection

After permission and approval were granted by the Texas A&M University Institutional Review Board, the secretary of a local small group ministry was contacted to obtain permission to distribute participation letters to potential research study participants. Once permission was granted to distribute the participation letter confirmed, a letter was sent to the church administrator of a local church to request permission to use their facility to conduct individual and focus group interview sessions.

Once permission was granted for participation in the study and the use of the facility, a filing system was designed to keep track of all research data through data coding which included: 1) field work notes and files, which includes notes about the research such as ideas and research problems, 2) interview documentation, consent forms, participation letters, and so on, 3) documentation of transcripts along with emerging theme documentation and notes about the study in general. Research files were kept in locked and secure file cabinet in an office.

Research Design

Sadelowski (2000) describes the qualitative research method as a combination of data collection, sampling, and re-presentational techniques. 1) the study design was developed during the course of the study. 2) research was the focus of the study. 3) the research design was commiserate of the progression of the study. 4) the researcher was the instrument. 5) emergent themes elicited theories as part of the process. 6) research was conducted in natural setting (Sadelowski, 2000). The purpose of the study was use autoethnography to explore the phenomena through focus group interviews and individual interviews by extrapolating emergent themes and theories and finding how they are duplicated in the research. The participants shared lessons learned and their perceptions concerning the role of mothers in education.

When I began searching for how I would form my study groups, I met with my committee chair and we discussed me including women from my church. I knew that getting consent from each participant would be relatively easy as we met for monthly women's group Bible study. I made a list of all the group members and separated them by categories based on whether or not they were mothers of African American decent and whether or not they had been reared by an African American mother. The small groups ministry was comprised of approximately 25 women and of the 25 women, eight women were selected who fit the criteria. Four women were selected for the young mother's focus group. I assigned pseudonyms for all participants' given names. Participants in the young mother's focus group included (See Table 3.1):

Gentle Gem, a married mother of three. She is a school teacher, new to the profession, in her first year. I came to know Gentle Gem when she and her husband joined our church three years ago. She is a quiet, soft-spoken woman, with a sweetness about her personality that makes everyone love her. Although she is quiet in nature, she speaks with gravity and passion. She is strong in her beliefs and has a strong church background. One of the most admirable things about her is her love for her family. She reminds me of myself at her age and when I see her children, they remind of the way I raised my children. Her children are always well groomed and very polite and respectful.

Cool Roadie is a married mother of four. I met her 16 years ago when my husband became her pastor at a previous church. She followed us to our present church and dedicated herself to working in ministry with us. She is an award-winning math teacher in our local school district. I think the bond between us began to grow when she decided to return to school to get her certification several years ago. As was stay at home mother, she had become stagnant and was dealing with self-esteem issues. I began mentoring her through that time in her life and the relationship has continued through today. Cool Roadie is known for her consistency in living, whether it is work or family, you can depend on her to be there and to give her all.

Spunky Heel Wearing Chick is a married mother of two. I first met Spunky Heel Wearing Chick nearly 16 years ago when she married the assistant pastor of church at that time. She has a vibrant personality exuding a whole lot of spunk. She is best known for loud speaking and laughter, always the life of the party. We met while she

was an undergraduate in college. Our mentor relationship was actually born out of the association between our spouses. Naturally over time, as her family grew, she attached herself to me as a positive influence and became more like daughter to me. One of the most admirable things about her is that she still works on her first job out of college. Her family structure is unconventional, as she is the primary breadwinner in the family. It is a role that she seems to have taken in stride for many years as she supports the dreams and aspirations of husband.

Private Major is a single mother of two. I met her 15 years ago, she was a member at a previous church. My first encounter with her was shortly after she had her second child. She was young woman who was overwhelmed with raising two children alone. We connected as I counseled with her concerning mothering. Later years she reunited with my husband and me and joined our current church. She is a shy person that expresses herself through her outward appearance. She relishes in making bold statements through tattoos and fitted clothing. She is a firm disciplinarian given to a stern disposition. She can be hard as flint but, when broken, she is soft as cotton. She is known for being controlling and unforgiving.

The women shared their experiences and as mentor and researcher, I was able to establish a level of trust between the researcher and the participants based on my relationships with each of the women.

The other focus group was made up of women who were slightly older than the other group (See Table 3.1). They were selected because they are African American and

had been mothered by an African American mother. Although it was unplanned, each of these women were over the age of 40. Women participants in this group were:

Gabby Girl, a single woman and the oldest of three children in her family. I have known her since elementary school, our friendship dates back about 40 years. We grew up in the same community. She is a passionate social worker. She is as passionate about her family as she is about work. She is a very generous person. She loves to shower her family and friends with gifts. She has never married or had children. She is the godmother of my middle daughter, a role she takes seriously. She is known for her brass personality. She loves to have fun but, only have all her work is done.

African Lioness, is a married mother of three. I met her five years ago when she and her family became members of our church. She wears her hair in sister locks and usually sports some form of African jewelry or fashion. She is one of the softest spoken women I have ever met. Her small voice rarely goes above a whisper in a crowd. We share a kindredness with regard to understanding what it means to be an adult caregiver to our parents. She is the only daughter caring for her widowed father. She loves to surround herself with friends and she is most comfortable in a crowd.

Yellow Butterfly is a newly married mother of two. She is the newest of our group, after joining our church two years. Most of my contact with her is formal in context. My role as mentor in her life is that of an encourager.

Homecoming Queen USA is a married mother of two. She has the ideal American life story. As homecoming queen and cheerleader, she married the star quarterback. They were the high school sweethearts who got married and had two

children. Even in her 40s, you can see traces of her youthful beauty. I met Homecoming Queen USA approximately eight years ago when her family joined our church. She is an extremely quiet person, she can easily be missed in a conversation, and will rarely speak unless she is spoken to. I have learned over the years that she has quiet strength. She does not say much but, when she speaks, she will surprise with her intellect and wisdom. She loves her family and it is evident by her dedication that they are her main priority. She is selfless. For example, she shared with the group that she drives her son's used car to work because he wants to drive her newer car to school. She has beauty both inward and outward, she is one of the most genuine people I know.

Table 3.1

Participants Who Were Mothered by African American Mothers

Pseudonym/Name	Age	Siblings	Race	Inquiry Form
Gentle Gem	33	1	African American	Focus Group; Interview
Cool Roadie	42	4	African American	Focus Group; Interview
Spunky Heel Wearing Chick	36	3	African American	Focus Group; Interview
Private Major	35	3	African American	Focus Group; Interview
Gabby Girl	46	2	African American	Focus Group; Interview
African Lioness	45	1	African American	Focus Group; Interview
Yellow Butterfly	47	4	African American	Focus Group; Interview
Homecoming Queen	47	5	African American	Focus Group; Interview
Naomi Johnson	75	8	African American	Interview
Ellen Wilson	64	8	African American	Interview
Doris Guyden	62	8	African American	Interview
Allan Abney	48	2	African American	Interview
Charles Smith	71	11	African American	Interview
Melissa Abney	25	2	African American	Interview
Courtney Abney	23	2	African American	Interview
Alexis Abney	22	2	African American	Interview

After conducting the focus group sessions for both groups, I scheduled the individual interviews. Due to a variety of schedules for each participant, I had to schedule the individual interviews based on participant availability. I began with scheduling the interviews with my aunts first. Because of their age, I knew that conducting the interviews midday would work best to allow them to take their time traveling. I staggered their interviews on the same day.

The interviews with my aunts offered a prolific inquiry of my grandmother's influence on their present day views. They also shared lessons learned and what life was like growing up in a home reared by an African American woman in the Black community in the 1940s to the 1960s. My aunts were also able to share their viewpoints on my mother's personality and achievements.

When the interviews with my aunts were completed, I began scheduling the interviews with my immediate family. Schedules were a little more difficult to align, which ended up working out because we live close to the Hopeplex, the facility used to conduct the interviews. My daughter Melissa's interview was the most difficult one to schedule because I had to wait for one of her visits home from Minnesota. My daughter Alexis was the first one to be interviewed, then I interviewed Courtney, my second daughter. Melissa was the last daughter interviewed when she came home for the holidays. The interviews with my daughters focused on their perceptions of me as mother and their perceptions of themselves as emerging African American women.

I decided to interview my husband before my father, as I knew my father's interview had the potential of being very emotional for me. I wanted to be prepared to

write immediately following father's interview. In the interview with my husband, he was asked to share lived experiences with his mother as a single parent. He also explored his perceptions of me as women and mother. My father's interview explored his relationship with his mother and his wife (my mother). He discussed his perceptions of me as woman, daughter, and mother. Mays and Pope (2000) cite the sharing of different perspectives as subtle realism in an attempt to give a realistic viewpoint in research. Participants used a conversational style to answer interview questions and to share their own stories about their lived experiences.

As noted in the research design section of this chapter, pseudonyms were assigned to participants to protect their identity. Pseudonyms were not used for my family as to offer an authentic viewpoint and link to me as the research instrument. As the researcher, I want to share their perspectives on me as a person, as well as, the views of my mother and grandmothers.

Data Analysis

Qualitative research relies on reliability, validity, and generalization to validate trustworthiness and credibility of a research study through member checks, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Denzin & Lincoln, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). During the young mothers' focus group, I heard reflections of their childhoods and their perceptions of their mothers' parenting. Although autoethnography can be viewed by some as self-indulgent, according to Sparks (2002) it is:

The inclusion of the researcher's vulnerable selves, emotions, body, and spirit;
the production of evocative stories that create the effect of reality; the celebration

of concrete experience and intimate detail; the examination of how human experience is endowed with meaning. (p. 210)

My research is grounded in the interpretation of the assumption and interpretation of the need for the voice of the African American mother in the Black community and in education. The lived experiences of the participants were framed to their own interpretations of their perceived notions of mothering by African American women and how the influence of these women became paramount in their perceptions of what strength and parental guidance means in the Black community and in education. The qualitative research method allowed for emergence of the theories that were simulated from the themes. Furthermore, it brought out the importance of participants' perceptions and allowed them to interpret these perceptions.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) offer that the organization of patterns for qualitative study consist of field notes, interviews, observations, and non-verbal cues with the human instrument as the primary roles in the source of data information collection.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

Trustworthiness is the means by which a research study shows the audiences that the study is worth paying attention to and that the findings have truth value (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For this study, triangulation was used to combine purposeful qualitative methods to increase trustworthiness and credibility of the study. A combination of digital recordings of participant interviews, research document analysis, field notes, and member checks were used for this study. This organization system allowed me to keep the integrity of the research procedures in place for auditing purposes. It also allowed

me to make the data information accessible for the researcher and easier to analyze. By having all the checkpoints for triangulation in place, I was able to safeguard the identities of the participants in the study. I was able to confidently assure them of that their identities would remain confidential by the use of pseudonyms however, family members who participated were not assigned pseudonyms and data being securely filed and locked in a secure location. As researcher, to give the study credibility, I have included information about me as the human research instrument.

Dependability and Confirmability

According to Shenton (2004) dependability, also known in qualitative research as reliability, employs that the same methods will work repeatedly in the same context and with the same participants and will yield similar results. Lincoln and Guba (1985) asserts that dependability is obtainable through audit inquiry of examining the product again and again. As the researcher, I took the approach of listening to recordings of each of the recorded interviews three times. I also read through the transcripts three times to check for interpretative accuracy. For confirmability, I kept an audit trail by keeping a research log of field notes, journal entries, and recorded data. In my research files I have kept copies of all digital recordings of interviews, field notes, and hard copies of the transcripts. All research records were available to the research participants upon request.

Member Checks

Member checks were conducted as an integral part of the triangulation process to ensure credibility for the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004). According the Lincoln and Guba (1985) member checks are essential to

strengthening a study's credibility. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) offer that member checks are a necessary practice for the researcher to allow the participant to offer more insight or interpretation of the data. Additionally, it is an opportunity for the participant to offer more information. Moreover, Denzin and Lincoln assert that member checks should be conducted at all costs.

Transferability

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), it is not the responsibility of the original investigator to know the extent of the sites by which transferability may be sought. However, it is the role of the researcher to offer as much descriptive data as possible for transferability to occur. The reader of this study can decide whether the research findings are applicable to comparable situations of their own study. The findings have been presented in a way that, I hope, the reader will be able to ascertain whether or not findings can be transferred to his or her situations. The responsibility of transferability is then left to the reader to determine its applicability.

CHAPTER IV

DATA ANALYSIS

While I have begun to see some the dimensions of my life unfold as I engage in the research of the literature, I would like to further analyze how my lived experiences and the storied lives of others who have been influenced by other African American women and who have lived the experience of being an African American woman (See Table 4.1). I am also interested in understanding how my life story has impacted the lives of my daughters. As an emerging scholar in womanist theology, I think it is important to do further research about the critical perspectives of other womanist scholars and theologians.

This analysis has afforded me a platform for giving voice to the matriarchs in my life (See Table 4.2). As well as the voices of African American women both past and present as important and influential in our community and in our schools. I believe when our voices are both heard and understood, school administrators will have a greater chance of providing more effective schooling for African American learners.

Angela's Journey

"I am going to finish school, just like you always wanted me too," I whispered as I leaned in at her bedside. It was September 12, 1996 and my mother lay dying in a hospital as I watched. I just could not believe it was happening this way, although I had spent the last five days keeping vigil in the intensive care unit (ICU) waiting room hoping and praying that my mother would recover from a massive stroke. In my mind, I just knew she would, after all, she always recovered.

I made that promise to my mother knowing that it was what she needed to hear at that moment. I had the strangest feeling that morning. I knew in my heart of hearts that I needed to find my father, who had been missing in action since the day she had the stroke, the previous Sunday. It was now Thursday and my mother had been on a ventilator for four days in the ICU. I left the hospital and went and searched for my father. I found him and brought him back to the hospital with me. It was 2:30 pm when we got into her room. We both stood there on either side of the hospital bed as she struggled to talk in broken gasps for air. I had spent five days expecting a miracle. I thought we had received one when the doctor told me they would be moving her during the night to a regular room. I did not know, I guess if the truth is told, I did not want to know or see the obvious. My mother was dying and she was probably leaving me that day. I had so much I wanted to say but, the only place I knew to begin was what she spent most of my life emphasizing the importance of education and making sure I could take care of myself and now that I had children, taking care of them as well.

The promise was more about giving her peace in the moment than about the actual intent and meaning of those words. I think I believed the words but, I did not fully ascertain how much that promise would drive my life from that day until now. It was just after my declaration that my mother solidified any reservation I had in my heart and the potential for me to break my promise. She said the words that I had waited a lifetime to hear, she said, "I love you Angie," as she looked into my eyes. She could not touch me, hold my hand or embrace me but, the words wrapped themselves around my heart and squeezed me so tight that it felt like a hug from God himself. As if the

moment could not have been more perfect, she looked at my father and said, “I forgive you, do you forgive me?” My father wept as he uttered, “Are you sure you forgive me for all the things I’ve done? Her response was “yes.” As the minutes lingered, I noted the time and left to pick my girls up from the bus stop. While home taking care of my girls, Mama passed away at 5:20 pm that evening. At 7:00 pm as I rode home from the hospital, I knew what I had to do; I had a promise to keep. I decided at that moment that I would not let anything stop me from fulfilling the promise I made to my mother on that afternoon in September.

Growing up in the Black Community

Being an only child has its pros and cons. I was my parents only child. I often credit my taste for the finer things in life to my upbringing as a privileged child of two working middle class parents, who spared no expense on showering me with anything a child could hope for from birth to adulthood. I grew up in a prominent Black community on the east side of town. My family bought the first house in the subdivision. I think my fondest memories of growing up in that neighborhood were the singular feeling of belonging to a place where family and community were one in the same. As children, we played outside under the watchful eye of every African American mother in the neighborhood. Children played hard and were accountable to every adult from block to block. Disputes between children were settled among the parents. Children listened to instructions and directives from the adults as if their words were the law. I was told countless times, “Don’t walk in the street,” “It’s getting dark and it is time for you to go inside,” and “Take turns and share your toys.”

There was an expectation that all the children shared what they had and the parents supported and encouraged it. Growing up in the Black community gave African American children a place to belong and a place to be accepted by people who believed and lived with the same ideologies as them. We understood what it meant to play games in the street, to pick dewberries from the woods down the street, and also what it meant to appreciate Mr. George the cab driver from across the street or to feel the pride for the high school football star from the neighborhood. The pride of the Black community felt like the big thing that we all had in common.

The Black community was an awareness and reality of belonging to a culture. It extended itself beyond the neighborhood to other places like school, church, work, parks and various venues. It was relative to place and location. It hinged more on being Black than about living next door to some else who is Black. The experience of being Black was more about the customs and practices concerning the way Black people did things. As children, whether it was at my friends or cousins on the west side of town or over in College Station, we all knew what it meant to watch Soul Train, listen to the Joe Daniel show on the radio, to go to church on Sundays, and to the park on Sunday afternoon; it was a way of doing things. In the Black community, we were taught the importance of church, family, and education. You could hear about this at home, at church, at a neighbor's house, an aunt's house, or wherever Black people congregated. There was an understanding that we all believed a certain way. There was a connectivity to believing and practicing the same way when it came to church, family, food, school, music, and language. We did not do all these things the exact same way, it was more about

understanding there to be a commonality among us that mirrored many of the same practices which governed our identity as a people. All my childhood experiences from birth to the summer of 8th grade are postulated on the ideology of Black culture in the Black community.

Transitioning Away from the Black Neighborhood

I spent my whole life associating my identity as a person from the Black neighborhood I grew up in. One day in the spring of 1981, my parents informed me that we were moving to a neighboring town on the south end of the twin cities. I could not fathom what that meant for me and my friends so, I did not share the information with them until the end of the school year, just before the for sale sign was placed in front of our house. My mother always had these ideas about us doing better, which meant moving further south away from the Black neighborhood, to a more affluent area of town. She wanted to live like the White people and that meant leaving the Black neighborhood for a bigger and better house and neighborhood.

I was afraid because I did not know what the change would mean for me as an 8th grader. I would have to make new friends at a new school in a new neighborhood. I recall my first day in the new neighborhood as rather daunting. I met two young White girls from across the street and it felt weird. We did not talk about games, music, boys, or church but rather, we talked about school and the other kids on the block. I felt really awkward, not because I had never been around White kids before, but because I was used to talking to kids who had things in common with me. For the first time in my life, I did not feel a cultural connection. I had no point of reference to draw from. For the

first time, I had to search for a commonality with two girls who were my age but not my race or from my culture. I was forced to quickly learn what my mother had been trying to teach me about accepting others and embracing people and their differences.

The first day of school came and I had to catch the bus at the end of our street. Thankfully, the two girls I had met days before were at the stop and introduced me to the other kids on the block. I rode the bus in silence because as I looked around, I noticed I was the only Black kid on the bus. In fact, I was one of only a couple of Black children in the entire subdivision at that time. I was anxious and a little depressed because I felt like I did not belong among those children. When the bus pulled up at the school, we exited the bus and I was immediately bombarded by a group of Black students. One of them told me, “We have been waiting here for you. You’re Angie, right? Your friend told us you were coming today.” This friend was one of my best friends from my old neighborhood. I was so relieved, still a little nervous but I felt more at ease. I was once again with kids like me. We had an understanding and a real unspoken connection. We had talking points that matched. We chatted away about church, music, food, and other things that we shared in common, none of which had anything to do with my neighborhood. It was more about the cultural connectedness. It was about all the things that made us connect rather than disconnect.

As difficult as it was, I transitioned that year from one neighborhood to another and I learned how to play new games in my new neighborhood. I learned how to just be a kid, not necessarily a Black kid but rather, just a kid in general. However, I still relished in the connectivity I shared with my Black friends from school. I even invited

them to my new neighborhood. New friendships were forged as I sought to bring my culture into the neighborhood. I was never really sure how the parents of the neighborhood children felt about their children playing with me, however, they never treated me differently, nor my parents their children. I became the babysitter for several families on the block. I think I learned a great deal about understanding my cultural identity that year. I learned to be who I was regardless of where I lived. My mother was right, opening myself up to new experiences and people did not change that I was a young Black teen, in fact, it broaden my perspective of the world, as an up and coming Black woman.

Home ‘Not-So’ Sweet Home

Getting past the transition from one neighborhood to another paled in comparison to what was going on behind closed doors. I think I developed coping mechanisms long before I knew what that meant. I was forced to deal with living the façade of a dream life in the great neighborhood, in a beautiful house, with the fancy cars. I had become accustomed to keeping a mask on outside of the house, whether it was at school, church, or in the neighborhood. I learned to live like my mother, we both kept up a great front for the world, while living in our own private version of hell on earth. My father was a functional alcoholic, given to bouts of violent tirades that held my mother and me hostage to mental, emotional, and physical abuse. I lived this throughout my entire childhood. I even went as far as to create an imaginary world to live from, just to cope with all the anxiety I carried around every single day. I used this “pseudo” existence to propel me towards achieving more in school. I set out to join organizations that would

allow me to excel in leadership. I joined the journalism staff and became an editor and advertising manager for the school newspaper. I ran and was elected to the student council. I used both of those platforms to rally for the cause of equitable treatment for special needs students. I immersed myself in various causes from muscular dystrophy walks, to volunteering at special needs camps, and helping to organize heart walks for the American Heart Association.

Somehow, I always felt that the way out of my pain was to parlay my energy towards a greater cause. I wanted and needed something else to think about. I needed something else to feel. I had enough of the slamming doors, broken glasses, and loud noises echoing in my ears. I needed to believe that there was a way for me to help change the circumstance for someone other than myself. My mother was not by any means content with the way things were at home but, she did little to change our living situation. For years, I blamed her for choosing to stay instead of taking me away from day-to-day ambiguity and instability. Since I never knew when things would be in disarray, I seldom had friends over to the house. I was forced to live closed-off to the world, finding solace in my room and at school. School dominated my world, I wanted to be there more than anywhere else in the world. It became my refuge, my sanctuary, and the safest place I knew. Most people would probably assume that church would have been that place, however, it was not for me. My parents put on their greatest charade at church. We were the “perfect” Christian family with Mama as the church secretary and Daddy as the deacon. I soon learned that God and church were two

separate entities. To me, God was real and church was just a place to go on Sundays. Reflecting back on this time shows me how much education has meant to my life.

High school was a turbulent time for me. As much as I loved school, it was a period of time that I was blossoming into womanhood. I wanted so badly to nurture a relationship with my parents, so that meant attempting to overcome the issues I had with them as a child growing up in our house. When I graduated from high school, I knew I wanted to move out on my own away from the dysfunctional life I had been forced to live in for so long. I decided that my escape from home would be to go away to college. This seemed like an easy solution but, it was one of the toughest decisions I ever had to make. I did not want to leave my mother there by herself. I was all she had and I felt the weight of that burden. I wanted my parents to find happiness. Once again here I was dealing with pain instead of joy over starting a new life. I felt guilty and the only way I coped with the guilt was to keep moving forward with my plans. I packed and I moved 50 miles away to attend a university.

A New Beginning and a New Path

I went away to college and that proved to be one of the best decisions I ever made. I left the instability of home and embarked upon my quest for self-discovery through education. It was not until my time on the college campus that I fully realized why my mother pushed so hard for me to keep my grades up. She had mandated that I keep my grades above a C average and she would not accept anything lower than that without consequence. As a college student, I learned more about self-discipline, spirituality, and time management than I had ever known. Those were all things that my

mother spent countless times teaching me. Education was the reason I was there and education would get me to where I wanted to go. I knew that because that is what my mother taught me.

I entered the university in the spring of 1986 as a sociology major with plans to work in the oil and gas industry. My plans were altered when I took a music education class as an elective. I fell in love with education as a result of taking that class. My passion for learning and school merged, which put me on the path to become a teacher.

New Life Breeds New Challenges

More came out of my new life when I met my future husband that same year. We married two years later in January of 1988. I had finally done what I set out to do at that point; I had a fresh start, new aspirations, and a new path. Allan and I were young and in love. We started our new life while living in married housing on campus. Our parents were not too thrilled about us getting married before graduating but, we were determined to start our life together. Things were great as we both dedicated ourselves to finishing school. After only five months of marriage, I found out I was pregnant. What seemed so simple up until that point, soon became complicated. Allan was closer to finishing school than I was so, he worked hard and graduated. He landed his first job after months of searching. We had to move in with my parents temporarily until the baby was born. This was not ideal for me because more than anything, I did not want to go back to unstable home life, which I knew still existed for my parents. Once again, I was forced to reckon with the issues of pain from my childhood and now my adulthood. I was

determined not to expose my newborn to the same angst I experienced as a child. It did not take long for us to save enough money to move into our own place.

My mother-in-law and I differed on so many issues early in our marriage. There was a constant tug-of-war between her and me over my husband. The stormy years between us lasted at least the first 10 years of our marriage. We just could not agree on much of anything from child rearing, food, money, or household chores. You name it, we disagreed about it. The only thing we had in common was our love for Allan.

Among all that was going on, I struggled with endometriosis, a female reproductive disease. I lived in constant physical pain that made it difficult for me to function daily, which was problematic for me as a new mom. We had our second daughter 19 months later and our third daughter 17 months after that. There we were with three children within the first four years of marriage. I was absolutely reeling with all the changes. I was determined to dedicate myself as a mother, which meant making sacrifices and staying home to provide the children with the nurturing and care that Allan and I both thought they needed.

Lessons from Caregiving

I always had a plan in the back of my mind about the day I would return to school. It was a personal decision for me to return to college and finish the degree I started. But, I knew those plans had to be placed on hold to care for my children long enough to give them a good foundation. I had watched my mother, as a nurse, be a caregiver to many people over the years and I learned from her that caregiving required

dedication and sacrifice. So, I committed myself to do whatever was necessary to give my children all the love and care they needed.

An opportunity arose that afforded me the chance to attend Texas A&M University (TAMU) on a full minority scholarship. I was finally able to work on completing my senior year of college. My extended family was very supportive and my aunt and cousin assisted by babysitting for me while I went to school and worked part time at a local bank. My mother helped me in the evenings by cooking and caring for the kids while I studied. It seemed like things were finally coming together.

Shortly after our youngest daughter was born in 1992, my mother was stricken with a debilitating illness and could no longer work or care herself. I knew that I would have to rescue my mother from living in her unstable home, which came with the threat of physical harm and emotional turmoil. We made the decision to bring my mother home to live with us. This decision came with another level of commitment to caregiving for my sick and aging mother while raising my three little girls then ages one, three, and five. Once again, I had to put school on hold as I cared for my mother for three and a half years, until the day she passed away.

The Last Leg to the Bachelor's Degree

My mother's death was a turning point. I reached a resolve to return to school. It took a few years before I was able to go back to school. I quit my job in 1999 and re-enrolled at TAMU during the spring of 2000. Unfortunately, there were several catalog changes over the years and I had to re-enter and take more classes than I anticipated but, I was determined to go. I spent the next three years taking classes. I worked full-time as

paraprofessional at a local school and I went to school part-time. I was the oldest student in many of my education classes but, I did not let that discourage me. I was overjoyed to be back in classes and learning new things. I felt inspired to teach. Statistics was my most difficult class and I needed it to graduate. During that time, I depended on my mother's voice to keep me focused. I knew she would have expected me to find a way to master that course so, I found a tutor and I studied night and day to pass the class. I passed the class and finally graduated with my bachelor's degree in August of 2003. I had kept my promise. It felt like heaven to walk across the stage. I knew I championed a major hurdle in life and I was ready to begin my career in teaching.

The Master's Degree

Just when I thought life was on easy street, I graduated with a degree and no teaching job. The local school district made changes to the language arts program and decided to lay off teachers and put a freeze on hiring. This left me in a quandary and no job so, after consulting with one of my professors, I decided to pursue a master's degree. I had no idea what would come next for me so, I became a long-term substitute teacher, while formally applying to graduate school. I had no clue what I wanted to study. I stayed true to my desire to teach and decided to apply for a master's program in curriculum and instruction. When I went to my first class, I could not believe that I had gone from taking 18 years to receive a bachelor's degree, to a few weeks later enrolling in my first graduate course.

I grew so much during the three years in the master's program. While doing my course work, I took classes in urban education, this opened a whole new way of thinking about what it means to teach in a pluralistic society. I learned about critical race theory, analysis of teaching behavior, and globalization. I think my studies set me on the path to learn more about issues of race and student achievement.

My interest in race also stemmed from things I learned from my mother. She was a passionate civil rights activist during the Civil Rights Movement. She shared stories about her participation in demonstrations while a student at Texas Southern University. I think she passed that trait onto me. I think that is why finding my voice is a defining experience for me.

Another Diversion in Life

The phone rang. I answered the phone and Allan said, "They said they can't do anything for her, because it's cancer. I have to bring her home." I replied, "Bring her home and we will clear out one of the girl's rooms."

In a split second our life went from ordinary to chaotic and uncertain. We were not certain about what bringing his mother, Irene, home would mean but, we were certain that we would weather yet another storm with one of our parents. I knew that I had to get the house ready with merely a couple of hours to spare. I completely went into caregiver mode, moving methodically to get a room cleared out and oxygen and a hospital bed delivered in record speed.

I thought about this type of scenario many times over the years. What would we do if something happened to one of our parents? We had gone through it once with my

mother. I always knew that I would step up and care for my mother-in-law if needed. I had assured her of this very thing again and again. Irene and I had come a long way from our rocky relationship during the early years of my marriage. The relationship had grown into a mother/daughter friendship and one of mutual respect. It took us nearly 10 years to reach a level of fondness and trust. We talked at least twice per day. We had grown close and this bond strengthened even more the day she came to live with us.

I was teaching at a local middle school while going to graduate school in the evenings. I was in the second month of classes for the spring semester in 2005. I wanted to quit school to care for Irene around the clock but she would not hear of it. Education was extremely important to her. She was adamant about me finishing school because she said she admired me for continuing my education. She told me I needed to do it for myself and for my daughters. She made me promise to keep going until I finished. We developed a ritual of me studying in a recliner by her bedside every day. We would discuss what I was reading and she would share her thoughts. It became an intimate setting because of how much she wanted me to share with her. We both knew she was beginning to fade away but, she still wanted me to share my experiences with her. It was also an opportunity for her to share things with me about her life, family, and growing up in the 1940s and 1950s.

Caring for Irene was one of the hardest things I have ever done in life. It was not because she required around the clock care because she did, but because it was emotional for me to tenderly care for her as she declined. She shared her struggles as a woman who fought to keep her dignity and grace as she lay there dying. I learned what

strength looks like by watching her go through that challenge. I also think I learned how to love hard from watching her demonstrate love to every person and creature she came in contact with. When Irene passed away five months after being diagnosed with stomach cancer, I wept because I lost both a mother and a friend. I was glad I got to show her how much I loved her. She definitely showed me that she had grown to love me as a daughter.

By the time I finished my coursework for the master's program, I was convinced that I was well suited to teach in an urban setting. I went on to teach at three Title I schools, each in an urban setting. In 2006, I graduated with a Master of Education with an emphasis in Curriculum and Instruction and an interest in Urban, Multicultural, and English as a Second Language (ESL) education. I knew when I walked across the stage that I had completed this degree for Irene and for me. It was no longer just about a promise fulfilled but rather, the igniting of passion and purpose for me as a woman.

Participant Analysis: Focus Group One

Focus group one was composed of four young African American mothers (See Table 4.1). The purpose of this group was for the mothers to share their perspectives on mothering, parenting, education, and community. Each woman came from various educational backgrounds. The women involved in the study were:

Gentle Gem who was 33 years old and a mother of three. She has two daughters ages 12 and 9 and a son age 13. Gentle Gem is a college graduate and works as a middle school math teacher.

Cool Roadie, a 42-year-old mother of four. She has three daughters ages 20, 9, and 8 and a son age 13. Cool Roadie is a college graduate and works as a middle school math teacher. She and her husband have been married for 14 years.

Spunky Heel Wearing Chick, a 36-year-old mother of two. She has two sons ages 13 and 10. She is a college graduate and works as a procurement associate. Spunky Heel Wearing Chick and her husband have been married for 15 years.

Private Major, a 35-year-old divorced mother of two. She has a son age 19 and a daughter age 11. Private Major is a single mother. She is currently in college and works full-time in retail.

Table 4.1

African American Women Who Participated in the Focus Groups

Name	Status	Age	Children	Emergent Theme	Desire for Children
Gentle Gem	Married	33	3	Believes education and affection is very important	To pursue their goals in life.. "My son, if he wanted to be in all level one [classes] – I mean making wise decision. But if he thinks – they think that they can do it, I want them to do it.'
Cool Roadie	Married	42	4	Believes education is important; keeping the family together is essential	To succeed by any means necessary. "Education is important with my kids, and I often tell them failure is not an option."
Spunky Heel Wearing Chick	Married	36	2	Believes parental support is very important. Love is shown through support and provision	To feel support. To love school so, they will enjoy learning because they love it. "I wanted them to love education like I loved it. I want them to love going to school, to love learning something new in math, because that's what I feel like. I just want them to love it."
Private Major	Single	35	2	Believes mothers have different ways of showing love, by wanting what is best for them.	To get their education whether it is the college route or not. Find a way to be productive. Hard work is essential to do well in life. "I would like for his life, both of my children's lives, to be, um, you know, just more successful."
Gabby Girl	Single	46	*	Believes affection and education are essential. Mother's show love in different ways. God and church are very important. Hard work and education are vital to success in life.	To be educated and to pursue higher education through good grades and scholarships. "I'm not a mother, I strive very hard to be a positive role model in the lives of, uh, children in the community. And, you know, to, uh, encourage them, you know, to be all they can be, and to let them know that, you know, there are ways to get to where they want to go, and um, to help them to do that and be that."
African Lioness	Married	45	3	Believes love is important. Take the lessons of mother and apply them to your life.	To find what they are passionate about it and pursue it through college, talent or trade. "I can't push that on my kids if that's not their passion, but I do stress that it's needed in the society that we're in right now. It's needed, and you always need to continue to learn, but learning something that you're passionate about."

Table 4.1 Continued

Name	Status	Age	Children	Emergent Theme	Desire for Children
Homecoming Queen	Married	47	2	Believes a loving and sweet personality is important when nurturing a child. Be supportive.	To teach them the importance of education. "I agree that education is important, and At least just go to school for six months to get some type of certificate and training. I encourage that. So, when I go back home now to Alabama, I see my little, my cousins down there, and I encourage the, and I try to instill in them to go to school."

Table 4.2

African American Family Members Who Participated in the Interviews

Name	Status	Children	Emergent Theme	Desire for Children
Naomi Johnson	Widow	1	Believes that African American women should rely only on God.	To be independent. Get your education and have a relationship with God. "Just don't put your hopes on-on anybody. Just put your trust in God." (Appendix B)
Ellen Wilson	Married	2	Believes a mother teaches you have to be respectable	To get their education. Work hard and live a respectable life. "Teaching them how to respect others." (Appendix B)
Doris Guyden	Married	1	Believes education is the key to a quality life	To pursue education because it is essential. "I taught my son always to give your very best." (Appendix B)
Charles Smith	Divorced	3	Believes mothers make sacrifices for their children. Mothers show love in many ways.	To get all she can get. "Momma instilled Christianity in all of us. And one thing about that – before, like on Sunday morning, one of us had to pray every Sunday morning. But yes, my momma instilled us – work. When we got old enough, we went to work, go to the cotton fields, pull cotton, and I never will forget – my momma used to be a strong woman because she'd be out there in that field and she'd be pulling cotton with one kid sitting on the sack.(Appendix B)
Allan Abney	Married	3	Believes education is paramount to success. Mothers show love in many ways.	To stay determined. "She taught me to never give up on what you set out to do." (Appendix B)
Melissa Abney	Single	*	Love and education are essential for success	To prosper and to love God. To feel loved and supported. "I will start with love, letting them know that they're loved at all times. I'm always there for them, um, the value and importance of education, um, also, walking in forgiveness and always showing love to others, um, the importance of relationship with God."
Courtney Abney	Single	*	We learn about strength from African American mothers. God has to be the center.	To do whatever they desire. To embrace God. "I wanna be the type of mother that – I wanna be able to take all the lessons that I've learned from my mom and capture those moments, capture those qualities along with the lessons that I've learned personally."

Table 4.2 Continued

Name	Status	Children	Emergent Theme	Desire for Children
Alexis Abney	Single	*	African American women rely on God and church. Education is essential.	To reach for their dreams. To know God. "I would instill in my children, we were raised in a Godly household." "Having a relationship with God is one of your top priorities.

Responses to Open-ended Interview Questions

Question: In your opinion, what has been the most challenging aspect of parenting?

The women shared their perceptions on what their relationships were like with their mothers. They took turns dialoging about how the challenges they were each facing in mothering their children.

Cool Roadie: My oldest daughter is in college now. I've been noticing when she's struggling with something, she'll pick up the phone and she'll call. Even though we talk every – we talk every single day. Um. I really count on her making wise decisions. Uh, my hope and my prayer is that she takes what I give her, or whatever options, or decisions, or words of wisdom that I share with her

Spunky Heel Wearing Chick: ...he's [son Jake] making friend choices to befriend people that we don't – we really don't know, because we haven't seen all of these kids through elementary school. Jake, he just turned 12, and it's his first year in middle school, and he and Tim, even though they're a couple years apart, um, being both boys, they were used to kind of doing the same things together, and we, as parents, um, whether it was good or bad, we kind of, you know, put them in the same boat. And, um, as of lately, it's been very obvious that they are not the same age. And so we've had to kind of set boundaries, um, between the two of them, you know?

Gentle Gem: He's the oldest brother, he's always been separating himself from the girls, but I've actually noticed the opposite. So my husband and I have been trying to really be open without being hard on him when he has friends that may not necessarily be the type of friends we want him to choose, but I don't want him to go through that period where he's sneaking, you know?

Private Major: It can be challenging thinking about, for my son, just going out into the world, and, um, you know, making his own decisions. You know, I would like for his life, both of my children's lives, to be, um, you know, just more successful. You know, I'm proud of my life. Sure, I made some, uh, you know, some poor decisions along the way. But at this point, you know, they've seen me grow, and that's what's most important to me.

Reflection 1. The young mothers each had different circumstances in which they were seeking resolve. Their inflection offered a glimpse of the cares and concerns of a young mother. This perspective gives an overview of the challenges parents face while attempting to parent in the 21st century.

Young African American mothers are concerned about their children's choices. They want their children to make good decisions when they are away from them. They also want their children to know they are always there for them in good times and times of struggle. I was surprised by their response because I thought their concerns would have focused more on social issues of today. The mothers seemed to be concerned about their children's adjustment to life changes.

When the young mothers were asked to describe their relationships with their mother, the responses were similar in context for three of the four women. Three of the participants described difficult relationships that ranged from abandonment and neglect to relationships that were void of emotion and affection but filled with discipline.

Question: How would you describe your relationship with mother?

Private Major: My relationship with my mom growing up, my mom was a very hard worker, always worked two or three jobs. As a single mom, she was a single mom. And I had three other siblings, brothers, um. It wasn't really good. We didn't really have a good relationship. Um, I didn't find that maybe not until I was in my early twenties that I was able to, um – because I was really, uh, really, as a child, I was, uh, more an introvert. So I kept a lot of things in. So it wasn't until my early twenties that I was able to voice to my mom, you know, the relationship that I feel like I missed out on. She never initiated a conversation.

Gentle Gem: Well, my mom left when me and my brother was like five and [crying] we lived with my grandma, too. But I remember having the same feelings like am I not worth it? Because I remembered everything that my mom did before she left and my brother did not remember. I remember her taking us to nightclubs and leaving us home alone.

Yes, and so when she passed away [crying] I was angry at myself again because I – I had shown it and I was just hoping that she knew that I had forgiven her for everything she had did and when she passed away

Reflection 2. Private Major shared the dysfunction of her relationship with her mother. I think this issue is reflected in disposition. I could identify with her because of the fact her mother did not initiate conversation. This left me wondering why a mother would not initiate private talks with her daughter female to female. This implies that her mother was also living with some kind of pain as a Black woman.

Gentle Gem described what it was like to live with the abandonment of mother. She also discussed what it was like to cope with hate and then to later arrive at a peaceful resolve in order to have a relationship with her mother. This was insightful, as it allowed me a chance to hear about the pain she carried from feeling abandoned. I was surprised that I did not know about the pain she carries because it is not reflected in the persona she projects.

Additional Responses

We didn't really have a good relationship.

[I] didn't feel as free and to be open to her about certain things.

I was so angry.

She passed away.

I was angry at myself again.

I was just hoping that she knew that I had forgiven her.

Reflection 3. It was surprising to learn that both women felt they did not have a good relationship with their mother. One mother's dysfunction was described as non-

communicative and the other mother was absent. I was not surprised that anger was a response to pain. I think hearing her share the pain and her resolve was needful. It shows how women cope with loss in pain. It also shows the ability of a woman to forgive despite hurt. The grandmother stepping in to raise grandchildren is not an uncommon occurrence in the Black community. However, it was insightful to note that Gentle Gem still did not view her grandmother as a mother. She referred to her as “my grandmother” and “supportive” which seem to indicate no mother-daughter relationship.

Cool Roadie: With me, my mother was young. She was 15 when she had me and she was in high school. I stayed with my grandmother. I stayed with my grandmother, and my mom left and went to college, and, you know, did what teenager young women did. She, um, she had her boyfriends and she – I was there with grandma, and grandma was working and taking care of me, and, uh, making sure that I had – because she was a teenage mom, my mother wasn’t really at that point front stage in my life. She wasn’t the one that was actually doing the provision part of it. It was more my grandmother. And, um, she went to school, and my grandmother took care of me. Um. I resented my mother for that. I resented my mother growing up because as she – as she grew up, I was growing up, and, you know, she often tells me now, she knows my age based on her because we’re 15 – 15, 16 years apart.

And I was here with my grandmother, and I was upset with my mom because I felt that she should have been strong enough to tell my grandmother that yes, I’m young, however, I want to raise my child myself.

It drove a wedge between my mother and me.

I felt my mother should take that role.

I felt left out and abandoned.

Reflection 4. Cool Roadie shared the pain associated with her mother’s abandonment. It was interesting to have two women describe similar abandonment issues with their mothers while being raised with by their grandmothers. Both were emotional accounts of their experiences. Cool Roadie’s responses were long and

detailed, which was an indication of a release. I have known her for over 15 years and never knew that she was abandoned as a child. I think the way women mask pain is amazing. Because I know Cool Roadie and her, I would never have known their relationship did not begin until Cool Roadie became an adult, as shared in the interview. This really speaks to why having a solid home with a mother and father is so important to Cool Roadie. It also adds insight into how Black children are often raised by other family members. A fact that should not go unrecognized because many times they live with a grandparent or an aunt or uncle as described by Cool Roadie but, they do not feel accepted or nurtured.

Spunky Heel Wearing Chick had a different sort of upbringing in comparison to the other group members:

I grew up in what society deems as the normal household. I mean my parents were married the entire time.

And she even worked at the school which made it even better. And she was in the cafeteria when I was in elementary school and I moved to high school, she came to that cafeteria, and so she's always there, and everybody always knew her.

And that was

mom, you know? It was – our relationship was interesting, because she wasn't as educated. And so when it came to homework, when I got into the advanced classes, it wasn't a lot that she could offer me in that sense, but I didn't really need it, you know, so it was okay. But she was the one, you know? She sometimes rode the bus with us to athletic events. I mean she was always in the stands. She probably didn't know much about what was going on, but she was in the stands.

Reflection 5. This perspective was insightful for the group because it opened the discussion of what Spunky Heel Wearing Chick viewed as a normal family. She was about to reflect on the structure of her family life and how this influenced her as a mother to her children. Her response was fused with a little frustration in the beginning

because I felt she did not adequately address the question concerning her relationship with her mother. But, as I analyze her responses, I can infer that her viewing her mother as always there, meant she depended on her mother's presence for security. I really did not know where she was going with describing her family as normal however, I concluded it was a way to separate herself from the negative image of mothering that had been shared with the other group members.

Question: How do you view your role as a mother in the community?

Private Major: I want to be seen as a mom, you know that – because I think what I tell my kids that you look back on this and appreciate it, you know, so maybe if they're not getting it at home, then they're more so to appreciate, well, I remember Jackie's mom, she didn't let us do nothing, you know? Didn't get away with nothing, you know? And they'll even, you know, I think they'll appreciate that. So I just think I'm that mom, I think I'm that mom that most kids don't want to see coming [laughter]. I'm going to tell you you're wrong, you gotta apologize

Cool Roadie: My role in the community, because I am in the classroom a lot, I have a lot of kids that call me mom. They come to me for the hugs. They even ask me for the hugs. And they ask me for the love that I think they are not necessarily getting from home. And they ask me to help them with their homework and do all the things that I think that they're searching for their mom to do. In the community with my children it seems like everybody want to come to my house for some reason. So I have all these boys going up my stairs, and the girls wanting to spend the night.

Spunky Heel Wearing Chick: I think that's the thing that I need to develop. The community is so different from how I grew up. I think that's a transition that I'm having a challenge with. You know, my mom knew all the kids in the community – in the subdivisions, it's a little different, you know? So I don't see all the kids at the bus stop because it's 15 bus stops on one street, so I mean I see the kids that live next door, and then there may not even be kids next door, so I haven't developed a role as mom in the community.

Reflection 6. The responses reflect how mothers become mothers to other people's children, especially if they are an educator or community leader. Although

Spunky Heel Wearing Chick could not identify her role in the community, by default as mother she becomes involved in the community, whether she's a soccer mom, visiting her child at school, or the parent at the neighborhood pool, she is visible and impactful in the community. One frustrating aspect to these responses, they do not reflect what I know of these women and their engagement in the community. It would have been more insightful if had asked them to describe their community involvement as a mother and volunteer. I think the responses would have been different.

Although their views differ, each woman was able to offer insightful perspectives on where they were positioned in society as mothers in the Black community and in the education of their children.

Question: Does your mothering style resemble that of your mother's?

Gentle Gem: Because I'm more – I tell my children, I love you, and we hug, and we play, and we wrestle, and we do all those things, but I'm still mom, you know? I'm not their friend. But then we have that relationship where they can come and play with me, you know? And I didn't have that, so I think my mothering style is completely different because I'm there. I'm actively engaged in their growing up.

Cool Roadie: I think some of the things – my belief in my mothering style and hers is totally different. I'm a little bit more patient with my children, where I feel my mother is not. I'm actually visible in the house with them all the time and I let them know that I'm there and I'm a lot I think more supportive than she was to me. And I think that's the difference between us, um. The relationship building that I have with my children is totally different than what she had with me and my brothers and sisters coming up.

Spunky Heel Wearing Chick: There are a lot of similarities in the way that she raised us that [how] I raise my kids. I will be that smiling face they can look for in the audience. And she was always that for me. Supporting our kids, making sure that they go after whatever it is in their heart to go after. And, some more, even if you don't know it, I want you to try this.

Private Major: I know she did the best that she could for what she was taught, but I just decided I wanted to be a little different. I think in my mind I said I'm not going to be you know anything like my mom, but, um, you know, in sitting and thinking about it, there are some ways that I am like her. Um, or that I've been like her. You know, I traveled the same road that I know she – she had gone down. But at the same time, to bounce back is the more important, and I feel like, um, even in her – at our age now, she – you know, there's still some things that she hasn't bounced back from.

My mother always – she taught us to fight. I've always taught them not to fight.

Reflection 7. The women seemed to take the negative aspects of their mothers parenting style to foster a different experience for their children. Where mothers were not affectionate, they have raised their children with the affection they feel they needed as a child. Negative life lessons like the fighting described by Private Major offers how spirituality helps African American mothers teach their children. During the interview, Private Major expounded more concerning her Christian beliefs and why she did not want to teach children to fight.

Question: What are the three most important life lessons you have learned from your mother?

Spunky Heel Wearing Chick: The appreciation and respect for all different diversities of race, I learned that from my mom.

Gentle Gem: She loves to cook, and I do love to cook I learned that from her. To love just regardless.

Private Major: My mom always liked a clean house. I prefer cleaning over cooking. She always worked. I've always had a job.

Cool Roadie: One of the things that I think I picked up from my mother is her strength. My mother is a strong, stubborn woman. My strength and my personality [and] to keep my family unit together is a big thing for me that I take from her.

Reflection 8. The women shared their perspectives on lessons learned from their mothers. It was good to see them ponder on their responses. When reflecting on the life lessons, the women were able to synthesize not only what they learned but also how they are currently applying the lessons to their life. As a researcher, this synthesis allows me to examine my own synthesis of lessons from my mother and my mother in law.

Participant Analysis: Focus Group Two

The participants in focus group two were African American women who have been mothered by an African American mother (Refer to Table 4.1). Each woman was raised in a predominantly Black community. They each shared their experiences of growing up during an era when mothers worked outside the home. Two of three of the women came from two-parent homes and the others came from a single-parent home. It is important to note that each of them shared their reflections from the perspective of what it means to be a child raised by a Black mother. They are also professional women with careers and work outside the home. The women involved in the study were:

Gabby Girl, a 46 years old college graduate from a family of three. She is the oldest of three and she has a younger brother and sister. She works as a social worker. She returned to college at 38 years of age and has obtained a bachelor's and master's degree.

African Lioness is 45 years old. She is the mother of three boys ages 20, 19, and 17. She is married to her husband of 22 years. African Lioness is an entrepreneur and hair stylist.

Yellow Butterfly is 47 years old. She was a single mother until she married her husband one year ago. She is the mother of two children, a son age 30 and a daughter age 19. She is an office administrator.

Homecoming Queen is 47 years old. She is the mother of two, daughter age two and son age 16. She works as a Sr. Administrative Associate. She and her husband have been married for 20 years.

Responses to Open-ended Interview Questions

Question: What was your mother's role in your life?

Gabby Girl: She wasn't like – she was [not] a stay [at] home mom. She was a work[ing] mom. She would dress us, feed us, get us out to school, and then she would go to work herself. She worked all day. She came home, and then she was mom again, um, after working a full eight hour day, and she helped us with our homework or made sure we did it. Uh, make sure we did chores. Uh, she fed us. She cleaned after us and got us to bed. Uh, she was also the disciplinarian in our home because, uh, my dad worked a lot.

African Lioness: My mother, uh, was a working mom as well. Um, very caring. She was, um, the hostess with the mostest. [laughter] I take that from her. Also, my house she kept together. She, um, she worked full time, took care of me and my brother, came home again, cooked the meal. Um, she was the financial guru of the home. She was the one that managed the money the best, but she, um, she always, um, gave my daddy his place. He was the man of the home, but she would always say that, um, "I let him be the man," but she also was the one that probably could hold it together the best.

Yellow Butterfly: My mom was the wife of – my dad was in the Army, so most of the time she had us by herself so he could be deployed to Korea or Germany for months at a time. My mom did not work outside the home, but she was always, you know, where – strength and she always taught us to get an education because she didn't have a full high school education.

Homecoming Queen: I come from a single parent home. My mom reared six kids. She – well, from my first recollection is her working as a maid, of course, for some of the families in the community. We lived in a really small town, and also working in a restaurant at nights. And, uh, a little later she actually became

the school cafeteria – she managed our school cafeteria for about 20 years after that.

Reflection 9. Each reflection led to a deeper discussion about what it felt like to grow up in their homes. The women shared through emotion and candid description of day-to-day experiences in their homes. The responses offered views of what their mothers did in relation to the household. Surprisingly, the women's responses did not reflect their role in descriptive roles such as caregiver, guide, supporter or a word that would give feedback from a receiver's perspective. Yellow Butterfly described her mother's role as associated with her father, as if they had shared identities. Inferring that her mom did not exhibit a strong identity of her own. Homecoming Queen's depiction of mother was described by the act of caregiving. Again, there was no emotional attachment shown in the description, maybe because she is the youngest in a large family. Homecoming Queen offers a broader description of the role of mother coming primarily from her older sisters.

Question: How would you describe your relationship with your mother?

Yellow Butterfly: My relationship it's a good, but strained relationship my mom can be an extremely negative person I don't do well with negativity. I need positivity.

Reflection 10. Yellow Butterfly shared her mother's insecurities about being violated as child. She passed these insecurities onto her children in her role as mother-protector.

Gabby Girl: I don't remember a lot of hugs and kisses and stuff like that. I think the way she showed her love to us was giving us stuff. I just knew she was, and that was my hug and that was my kiss.

Reflection 11. I found Gabby Girl's perspective on her mother's actions and the way she shows her love to be interesting. When asked in the member check, she shared that she did not really understand it growing up but, she reached a resolve later in life as she watched the way her mother interacted with her own siblings.

Researcher's note. Based on responses about their relationship with their mothers, I wanted to go a little further in the discussion of the lessons they learned from their mother. The women shared an extended dialogue concerning the way they view their mother's role in their lives.

Question: What are the three most important life lessons you have learned from your mother?

Gabby Girl: She's always been extremely social service oriented, and that's what I grew up around, and that's just who I am, and that's what I saw her do, and that's what I took on. And then she was, uh, executive director of the Legal Aid, and now she's a Justice of the Peace and mom is, you know, already at 70, and she still works hard, hard every, every day. And I, I know I got that from her and it's, you know, it's something that I learned in life, you know, to be a very hard worker or be ethical about when I go to work every day. You know, don't cheat on time. Don't steal from the company, that kind of stuff.

African Queen: She's always taught me to be a hard worker. And she would tell me and everybody else in the family, "Don't spend everything you make. Save something." So that she knew how to make do. She believed in also another life lesson was, you know, showing, giving flowers while they're living. You know, she took care of my grandmother, and so that lesson has been instilled in me now that she's gone. You know, I'm doing it for my father.

Homecoming Queen: I guess one of the most things that the, the, best thing that I have taken from my mom is just, uh, just trying to be good and kind-hearted because that's exactly what she was, and, and uh, I have always tried to do the same thing, and give people the benefit of the doubt to encourage people. Um, and just be there for them whenever they're needed, it's needed.

Yellow Butterfly: I have one life lesson at this point that resonates with me in that, um, that I look at I took a negative and turned it into a positive that with my kids I wanted them to know that you can come talk to me about anything.

Question: What is your perspective on the role of African American mothers and education?

Don't just stay stuck and put yourself in a box.

Just continue to get education, whatever method that is,

I think whatever path that they decide on, you just have to encourage them in it.

I'm really big on education

I really push with my children is make good grades.

Do well in school.

Study.

Don't just go to get by.

Make good grades

Reflection 12. The answers to this question overlapped. Because of the redundancy in the responses, I cited them as series of responses without the participant names. The women seemed to share the same philosophy on the importance of education and the diligence needed to achieve success. Each of the women discouraged mediocrity and promoted the making of good grades. I find it interesting that the women's views on are similar to family members.

Participant Analysis: Family Interviews

Interviews were conducted with family members to offer perspectives on the influence of African American mothering and growing up in the Black community (Refer to Table 4.2). I interviewed my aunts, daughters, father, and husband.

1. Daughters

- a. Melissa is my oldest daughter. She is 25 years old and a college graduate. She works as a product manager for a Fortune 100 company.
- b. Courtney is my middle daughter. She is 23 years old and a college graduate. She works as a project engineer for a global construction company.
- c. Alexis is my youngest daughter. She is a senior in college. She is majoring in business management.

2. Aunts

- a. Doris is 62 years old and retired. She has been married to her husband for 42 years. She has one son age 39 and two granddaughters ages 11 and 8.
- b. Ellen is 64 years old and retired after teaching special education for 40 years. She is mother to a son 43 years old and daughter 42 years old. She's been married for 23 years.
- c. Naomi is 75 years old and retired. She is a widow and mother of one daughter age 42 years old.

3. Father

- a. Charles is 71 years old and retired. He remained a widower for several years after his wife's death. He re-married but is currently divorced. He has three children; one daughter age 47; two sons ages 49 and 51.

4. Husband

- a. Allan is 48 years old. We have been married for 26 years. We have three daughter ages 25, 23, and 22. He is a pastor and entrepreneur.

Responses to Open-ended Interview Questions

Question: What life lessons have you learned from your mother?

Aunt Doris: Be responsible for yourself and you can – no matter what your plight in life is, it – be that, you know, you're a single parent or a married person, um, be that you're rich or poor or in between –

Aunt Naomi: I guess I learned that I could do – I can do whatever I need to do. Uh, I-I don't think that – I don't think that there's anything that-that I need to do, uh, okay like when Kim was young. I don't think there was anything that I thought I couldn't handle.

Aunt Ellen: I had to always keep a job, you know, because, you know, nobody was not going to, you know, take care of you, you know, you had to do what you could, you know. The main thing was keeping a job and keeping your children clothed and fed.—how to—how to survive, you know. You had to, you know, how you had to go to work.

Reflection 13. Because they grew up in the era when actions spoke louder than words, they describe my grandmother by her actions. She was ‘God-fearing’ which meant she taught Aunt Ellen to love and respect God. Aunt Naomi referenced being taught to do whatever is needed to survive. I was amazed to hear that she got this lesson from my grandmother, I always wondered what propelled her to make it through a traumatic divorce the way she did. I really was not surprised by my Aunt Doris’s response. She is the baby of the family and as such, a lot of the mothering for her came from her older sisters. I noted a sort of disconnect for a moment until she was able to internalize the question and relate to her own grand-parenting.

Melissa: Um, one of the big ones is, when you have a dream, never give up on it. Um, just watching her, um, through the years, not give up on her education and wanting to go to school and, um, complete her undergrad and – but then going – not just stopping there then her master’s and now working on her dissertation-I would also say that I’ve learned, um, what love really is and what forgiveness is about, um, because, no matter what, she always loves unconditionally no matter what people do or say or how they act even if they can do like the most awful thing in the world. She still forgives and loves them no matter what.

Courtney: ... one of the most important that I really hold close to me that I'm stilling trying to work on myself because I know that it's gonna take a while for me to actually get it an understand is forgiveness. I can make it through anything – anything that's challenging, [you must] first to believe in yourself.

Alexis: I struggle with constantly in life, and, um, the one that is just the most is forgive. I tend to struggle with forgiving a lot, but she has taught me to forgive, and forgiving makes you stronger than anyone else she chooses to be strong, and I think she does that for me and my sisters. I think she strives every day to show us what a woman is --what a strong woman is.

Reflection 14. As I listened to the responses of my daughters, I was surprised to hear each of reference my life challenges and how I overcame them. To be honest, I did not know they even knew about most of them. I guess as mothers we share our experience with our children whether they are bad or good. I think the most profound aspect of hearing about the lessons they have learned from me, that each referenced love, forgiveness, and perseverance, all of which are intangible. As parents we spend more time worrying about giving them materials things but in fact, it is the intangible that helps to shape who they are.

Charles (Father): I learned how to respect other people. I learned how to say yes ma'am and no ma'am and yes sir and no sir.

Allan (Husband): She's always had this independence about her that I feel like flowered into what has helped me be what I am.

Reflection 15. The interviews of my family offered a view of what life was like for them from their own perspective, which differed from my perception of what I have seen and experienced with them or through memories that have been shared throughout our lives. Many stories of a mother's love and sacrifice were shared during each interview.

Allan: I can't remember my mother ever buying makeup. If she did buy something it was at a secondhand store. I've never known my mother to go to the, to the mall or to a women's department store she would drive her car until it couldn't go anymore.

Charles: But momma was – well, she'd go out of her way for her boys. She would get money and give it to us.

Melissa: My mom was always there encouraging me and pushing me, with the simplest thing, being there at my school plays or my school events encouraging me to move forward, you know, wanting to know about what I was working on.

Reflection 16. The interviews offered insightful dialogue with each participant.

Participants expressed that they had not thought about some of things asked until they were reflecting to while responding to the questions. I was moved by the information shared in each interview. For some of the participants, the interviews became so emotional that tears were shed as they unearthed their true feelings. I used their responses to the interviews to create queries to find commonalities and themes for this study.

Analysis of Themes

Digital recordings were made of each focus group session and interviews. Nvivo transcripts were analyzed. As I read through the transcripts I noted reoccurring topics from participant responses. The reoccurring topics each produced key words or phrases that were about to be categorized and grouped in Nvivo to create queries that linked participant responses. As related topics surfaced in the transcripts, I was able to recognize the emergence of the themes that were shared by the participants. I made a list of the themes and used the queries to extract quotes from the transcripts. The following themes emerged in the study:

1. Love is shown in many ways. African American women sometimes have difficulty showing affection in traditional ways but, they love what they do and

not always by hugs and kisses. This was true most often for African American women who were mothered by African American mothers.

Yellow Butterfly: My mom now is more nurturing than she was then, I don't remember-- you know, kisses or any of that.

Gabby Girl: I don't remember a lot of hugs and kisses and stuff like My mom was just a really, really hard working person. She showed her love to us was giving us stuff... the last seven or eight years. Um, she's getting to be more hands on.

Homecoming Queen: There was actually no hugging nor kissing nor touching in the family, and uh, never, "I love you." ... so I've always been a little uncomfortable in saying it. Only recently within the last ten years have I ever said, "I love you" to her and she's actually said it back.

African Lioness: She did hug and she kissed. She hugged us and tried to teach us to hug each other. "You and your brother have to stay close." It's one of the things that I kind of miss, so I make sure that I have it with my family.

Private Major: I didn't have a relationship with her where I would actually just talk to her about anything. That just wasn't there.

The women shared how the absence or presence of the hugs and kisses impacted how they responded to their own children and men in general. When the open affection from the mother was hindered or absent, the women found the need to search for it in other relationships in their lives. Whether it was through a promiscuity or bonding with a "mother" figure to receive the nurturing they felt they needed.

Women from the Young Mother's focus group also expressed some of the same feelings about the absence of affection from their mother's. They too shared how impactful this void was in their life, as they longed to have this type nurturing in their relationship with their mothers. The absence of this bonding experience, lead them to shower their children with affirmation and affection.

Spunky Heel Wearing Chick: But as far as I love you and all that affection, we didn't grow up with a lot of that.

Gentle Gem: he [her son] wants me to be that mom that wakes him up and gives him hugs he jumps up, he gives me a hug. I didn't grow up with, someone always hugging and saying I love you.

Private Major: ... as a child, I was, uh, more an introvert. It wasn't until my early twenties that I was able to voice to my mom, you know, the relationship that I feel like I missed out on.

Cool Roadie: I got grand mothered. Grandma, she made sure that I had something to eat. She made sure I had shelter. Maybe mom sent money. The relationship between me and my mother didn't happen until much, much, much later.

Based on their responses, the women equated care with love. Cool Roadie and Gentle Gem were reared by their grandmothers and despite the care they received, the absence of affection had a lingering affect. Once again the absence of affection caused a residual effect on them even as adults. Care and affection are linked to love and acceptance.

2. African American women pass on strength as a legacy. When children reflect on the attributes of strength in the mothers, they perceive perseverance, discipline, and overcoming as examples of true womanhood and adulthood. Their perceptions of the lessons learned from their African American mother often reflect on how their mother transferred these qualities to them. When asked to share how their mother inspired them participants replied:

Alexis: I would say determination. Every possible obstacle has come against her no matter what, it's never changed her determination to be that's something that I can only hope for, There's no words for her strength. She pulls herself out. She does it with a smile. I could only hope for her type of strength.

Courtney: The strength that she provides is, um, both intern – is internal and external. That's taught me that I can make it through anything – anything that's challenging.

Melissa: Just watching her not give up on her education and wanting to go to school and, um, complete her undergrad and – but then going – not just stopping there then her master's and now working on her dissertation– a mom of three and like us doing all the things we did.

Charles: She'd go out of her way for her boys. She would get money and give it to us. That's just how good strong and wonderful my mother was.

Allan: She was a strong disciplinarian. She demanded, she demanded the best from us.

She didn't let us be mediocre. Her desire was for us to go to college and she, I remember her telling us "I don't care what degree you get just as long as you get a college degree and once you get that I'm done."

African Lioness: To be strong. No matter what you face, you'll make it through.

Aunt Naomi: She was very strong but it was like they, uh, like they looked to her for the wisdom.

Yellow Butterfly: My dad was a high-functioning alcoholic, but she, she stayed through that, you know. We never missed a meal. She was the disciplinarian. She was no-nonsense.

A mother's strength was described as a means of survival. Charles reflected on how his mother shared money with them at a time when money was scarce. Aunt Naomi saw her mother's strength and perseverance in her ability to multi-task by caring for her children and extended family while working faithfully on her job. Allan saw the strength of his mother as she pushed her children to achieve more. He also shared some of her struggles as a single parent and how she did her best to be present in their lives. The participants described the lessons of strength and perseverance as qualities that were passed on by their mothers whether it was a strong work ethic, organizational skills,

money management skills, or how to go after your dreams and aspirations, either way, they have harnessed the lessons and are striving to keep the legacy alive.

3. African American women and mothers rely on God and church in their leadership. Spirituality is an important aspect of the Black community. African American children are taught to honor God and to regard faith as an important aspect of life. They are taught to make spirituality of part of who they are and not just what they practice. It seemed that the older African American women reference the importance of a relationship with God more than the young mothers. This was evidenced in the participant responses:

Gabby Girl: She didn't drop us off at church. We went to church with her. My dad wasn't very active in church.

Spunky Heel Wearing Chick: I watched my mom take care of my dad and take care of a preacher. And, um, watching her, I always wanted to marry a preacher too.

Private Major: I think the I think I know I picked up from her, her accepting Christ faith that her and I share now.

Aunt Naomi: I [taught her to] don't depend on anybody else... don't say, "I'm gonna marry this man and he's gonna take care of me," Just put your trust in God.

Melissa: ... letting them know that they're loved at all times ...always there for them... the value and importance of education... walking in forgiveness always showing love to others... the importance of relationship with God.

Courtney: *God is the head*— God is consulted first. We seek him first in everything so all decisions...

Alexis: ... we were raised in a godly household. I will raise my children in a church having a relationship with God.

When spirituality is taught, children grow up with an awareness of what grounds their life. As the participants shared their reflections, they were passionate and adamant about their beliefs.

4. African American mothers and women views on education are paramount in the Black community. African American mothers view education as important to success in life. Education is emphasized and the achievement of African American children is enforced in the home. Participants noted this in the responses.

Alexis: ... they instill education so deep into their children... they just want their children to be great people. Education is not an option. My mom has this role that she instilled in us since we were like in elementary school. You must graduate with your bachelor's degree before you even think about getting married, or she said, "You can stay engaged as long as you want to, but you must graduate with your four-year degree," which means, as I took [it], if I don't graduate, I'm not getting married. ...my mom says you have no other option... she really wants us to get a bachelor and a master's degree.

Courtney: Education is held to such a high esteem... my mom had – had three-three kids, a husband, a sick mother, and still went to school. I have absolutely no excuse not to want better.

Doris: We're given confidence to make better choices in life. Education is a process that we learn how to live life and live life better.

Cool Roadie: Education is important... failure is not an option. It is not an option. show them things outside of what their norm is... how they're able to achieve. You're going to make it happen.

Gentle Gem: Education is very, very, very important to me. I want them to try everything. I want them to try to reach for their goals.

Allan shared how the emphasis of education has influenced our daughters:

Melissa has graduated from college and now she's in Minneapolis and she's there by herself. She don't take no for an answer. She figures out a way. Courtney just recently graduated from Prairie View and we had our challenges

with her when she was at, you know, the community college, but when she got to Prairie View she blossomed and she figured out a way. Christy [Alexis], you know, she's now at Prairie View.

Yellow Butterfly: ... she always taught us to get an education because she didn't have a full high school education.

Gabby Girl: I see the sacrifices that she makes for us now, you know, for education. I know I will take that on from this day forward. "Just tell me what you need, you know, and I, I will pay for it for you."

Yellow Butterfly: I think that the role [of a mother] is to be as supportive whether their path or education be a trade.

African Lioness: I do believe that education comes in different forms. It's not always going to the collegiate school. I tell all of them to follow your passion.

Each response offered a perspective on the relevance of education and how its importance is transferred in the Black household. Indeed, these values are replicated throughout the community from generation to generation. Several of the women shared how they returned to school later in life to complete college degrees. The determination of these women is the result of internal motivation from the value of education being instilled in them by their mother or another African American woman in their life.

Conclusion

The lives of the African American women as shared in the focus groups and interviews are the epitome of the type of women that have led the Black community for many years. The young mother's focus group, older mother's focus group, my aunts, father, husband, and daughter were the participants in the study. The participants in this study were forthcoming in their responses and offered a prolific view of the influence of their mothers and grandmothers. They also shared their own challenges insecurities from abandonment, mother/daughter relationships, mothering their children as an

African American woman, and raising children in a culturally diverse society. Their perspectives are relevant to the challenges that educators are facing today. Educators are faced with changing demographics, diverse student populations, and achievement gaps with African American students and their White counterparts.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Reflecting on Reflection

There was never a question as to whether or not I had a good relationship with my mother or whether or not she loved me, both she and I understood it. As I reflect on what that relationship meant to me, I now know that it was the relationship I most depended on throughout my life. She was the one person that I never had to wonder whether she loved or supported me. It was this assurance that kept me focused on what mattered most in life. I have spent many years pondering over the choice my mother made to stay in the abusive relationship with my father. It was not until I was able to listen to the lived experiences of the participants in the study, that I truly reached a resolve concerning my mother's decision to stay with my father. I can now see that her choice to stay was a selfless act of love for both him and me. As I examined what I knew about my mother's life, what my family members knew of her life, and what I learned about the way African American mothers show love, my mother's choice to stay was part of her legacy of strength that she imparted in me. All my life I viewed Mama's actions as selfish but, I now see the love. This revelation has helped me to eradicate years of resentment and frustration that I felt when I reminisced about my childhood. Looking back at my lived history has allow me to see the historical relevance of life history. The ability to look back is a powerful tool to use toward the process of healing and the overcoming of pain.

There are many ways to look back at history. There is the history of both our country and the world as a whole. However, there is a distinct difference between both of those and the history of one's culture, race or ethnicity, and one's life history. When I think about family history, I am reminded we each have a life path, and the path is what ties us to who and what we have become and will become as individuals.

By and large, as a woman, I believe the history of the African American woman's plight helped to shape my journey into womanhood as well as my journey to finding my voice as a Black woman; which is the epitome of true strength, resilience, and fortitude. I have found these to be the most compelling attributes of the African American woman that seems to transcend through time. These are the qualities that are most often passed onto the younger generation of women. I have firsthand knowledge of this legacy. My grandmother, mother, mother-in-law, as well as my aunts were each strong women in their own right. Each of them were women who worked, mothered, and were revered as spiritual gatekeepers of the family.

The purpose of this study was to help find meaning in leadership through shared lived experiences and issues facing education. The findings from this study will hopefully offer strategies and ideas on ways to strengthen the relationship between school administrators and parents in academic, social, and cultural contexts. Although this research is told through the lens of an African American woman in leadership, the portrayal of a real woman, mother and daughter, offers insight into Black culture as instilled and passed on to other African American women as an embodiment of Black cultural heritage.

I have not always embraced my role as a spiritual leader. In fact, I did not really embrace it until Allan and I were called to pastor a small church in a rural community in 1992. I was forced to realize my role as I had to perform several different roles in ministry. I played the piano, taught Sunday school, sang as a soloist while mothering a newborn and two small children. We had an exceptionally small congregation, seven parishioners and three of who were seniors over the age of 70. As I reflect on that time of forced growth, I can see that the humble beginning allowed me to appreciate my growth in teaching God's word. As resistant as I was at the time, I can now see the benefit of it all.

The understanding of spirituality of African American women offers tremendous insight into how and why we do the things we do. For me, as an African American woman who is a spiritual leader, the practice of spirituality is an intrinsic value system that governs my decisions and thoughts. Spirituality is not only what I do at church but rather, it is the practice of applying what I learn and teach at church to my life holistically. As leader, when I teach concerning love and forgiveness, I am able to apply this in my leadership practice by living as an example of loving my neighbor as myself. This is a biblical principle found in Mark 12:30-31, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." The second is this: "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 22:39). There is no commandment greater than this.

As I listened to the older mother focus group participants, I am reminded of how much of my life in ministry is an extension of what I saw my parents do in church during

my childhood. The discussion of the importance of spirituality and church in the lives of the participants, helped me to see what my parents were trying to teach me by taking me church. Instead of merely looking at the shame associated with what I viewed as hypocrisy, I now see the lessons of responsibility towards church duties and the respect for God and all what he represents to our family by way of blessings and a good foundation. I learned to be diligent and committed to church regardless of personal struggles with my parents. As a woman, I have learned that the pain of shame lessens when the value-added becomes more about love and resolution than the pain associated with memory.

For years African American women have been labeled by negative racial and ethnic stereotypes such as burly, brazen, and many times being regarded in a negative context as a mammy or servant, whose image is described as a domestic during slavery times (West, 1995). The visualization of this image has done little to bolster or embrace the positive aspects of the African American female's personae. West (1995) offered that Black women have historically been viewed as highly maternal and family-oriented, threatening/argumentative, opinionated, seductive, and sexually-driven. Although the later offers a jaded perspective on a distinct image of the Black woman, this view merely seeks to highlight and juxtapose a strength perspective. This is shared from the positionality of the African American female who has been mothered by an African American female and their role as an influential leader and how this role has impacted their lives. Voice speaks in many ways.

I think my journey to voice really became evident when I embarked on this doctoral journey. I have learned so much along the way. I think I could see the evidence of my faith in every aspect of the pathway. For years, I was quiet about my aspirations, afraid to dream big. Yet, I found it easy to teach my children to dream big like so many African American mothers. In search of my voice, I examined the following questions:

1. Who am I as an African American daughter, woman, wife, mother, teacher, and leader?
2. What has been the impact of being raised by an African American woman who experienced domestic violence?
3. How do my experiences support the plight of African American mothers who experience struggles with schools as they raise their children?

Findings from My Analysis of My Journey

Who am I as an African American Daughter, Woman, Wife, Mother, Teacher, and Leader?

Theme: African American women and mothers rely on God and church in their leadership. Spirituality is an important aspect of the Black community (Hye-Cheon & Yeary, 2011; Lyon, 2013; Ogletree, 2012; Skerkat, 2002). African American children are taught to honor God and to regard faith as important aspects of life. Spirituality is of part of who they are and not just what they practice. It seemed that the

older African American mothers in the study referenced the importance of a relationship with God more than the young mothers.

The research findings and data analysis of my own personal experience supports the finding that church still plays a vital role in the African American community. According to the research on Black churches, they are an integral part of the shared identity of Black people (Hye-Cheon & Yeary, 2011; Lyon, 2013; Ogletree, 2012; Skerkat, 2002). When looking at the data, this view was not shared by all the participants in the study. Although, the participants identified with being African American, they did not refer to their inclusion into the personae of the Black community.

According to my findings, African American women share God and religion through their church experience. Children are taught from an early age that church attendance is important through the promotion of a relationship with God. In Chapter II, this was evident in the description of shared experiences concerning the history of the women in ministry and the move away from traditional religion to more inclusive styles of worship that endorse women as leaders. Further, as noted in Chapter II, African American women and children are more grounded in their spiritual beliefs because of the importance placed on God and spirituality (Berry, 2008; Hye-cheon & Yeary, 2011; Loder, 2005; Lyon, 2013; Ogletree, 2012; Skerkat, 2002). The women in my study shared their perspectives on their mother's influence on their spirituality, noting that the leadership of the African American mother was usually the strongest when they were younger, through the instilling of biblical principles. They were taught to "just put your

trust in God” and “walking in forgiveness” and to be a person who is “always showing love to others.”

As my mother raised me, she emphasized the importance of church affiliation and participation. My reliance on God through my struggles as a child growing up in a troubled home fostered my relationship with God. I still rely on God for comfort and guidance. I also emphasize the importance of the church affiliation and participation with my daughters, however, I feel that I went even further with teaching them about spirituality by encouraging them to have a personal relationship with God.

My husband and I have spent our adult lives as spiritual leaders and as such, I have never really known how to balance my role as a pastor’s wife and educator. As a co-pastor and educational leader, this research study has challenged me to value who I am. I always felt church leadership was different from my leadership role in education. I have learned through this study that it requires perspectives from both to make me a better leader. Being a spiritual leader is what God intended for my life, now I know I do not have to choose one over the other, as referenced in Jeremiah 29:11:

For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not evil, to give you an expected end.

By embracing my role as a spiritual leader and I am cognizant of the need for not only striving but rather, the call to thrive beyond the challenges I have faced as an African American woman, educator, and leader. The ministry has caused me to not only work for the cause of promoting African American families from a church standpoint, but it has also required me to look beyond my role as a church leader to that of a holistic

leader by incorporating my roles as an educator and co-pastor. Moreover, I feel that as a spiritual educator, I must be vigilant in projecting my voice on behalf of African American children to assist them in finding the resiliency they need to combat social marginalization, oppression, and discrimination they encounter on a daily basis.

Findings from My Mentees

How Do My Experiences Support the Plight of African American Mothers who Experience Struggles with Schools as they Raise their Children?

Theme: Love is shown in many ways. African American women sometimes have difficulty showing affection in traditional ways but, they love what they do and not always by hugs and kisses. As a child, I cannot recall a time when I was given open displays of affection from my mother. I identified with several of the women in the study as they described growing up without hugs and kisses from their mother. My mother was not an openly affectionate person who was given to hugs and kisses. In fact, her stoic disposition countered any obvious signs of emotion in most instances unless she was emotionally distraught. As a child I longed for a hug or kiss as an open display of affection but, I did not receive that until I became a Born Again Christian and as a result, I began initiating displays of affection. I began embracing my mother when I greeted her. At first, the embracing felt awkward but over time it became more natural, however, there was still never an ‘I love you’ associated with the embrace. Like the women in the focus groups, I declared to myself that I would shower my children with affection. I vowed to teach them what love looks and feels like. Listening to the stories of the women who participated in this study has helped me to understand how my

mother showed her love for me and also understand why I am overly affectionate. Like double-checking a locked door, I tend to go back again and again to affirm my love for my husband and my children, now I know why. As a result of understanding this, I can now share this truth with other women who were not shown affection by their mothers.

Prior to conducting this research study, I had not defined my role in the lives of the women in my focus groups. I tended to regard it as a Bible study group however over the last few years, our meetings have evolved into more than studying the Bible. The meetings have become more about empowerment. For the women in the young mother's focus group, I have become a role model and spiritual mother. They have come to rely on advice from me as I share my life experiences, words of inspiration, and biblical teaching. I now see myself as their mentor and to some, they already view me as a mother figure and they call me Mom. I think they are drawn to the love I show them and also by the fact that I strive to practice what I preach from the Bible. For example in John 15:12: "This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you," and in 1 Corinthians 13:8: "Love never fails." Because some of my mentees did not grow up with affection as children, I want make sure that I continue inspire them to nurture their children through love and affection.

Although this theme was supported in the data, the African American woman's way of showing love was not supported by the review of literature when researching how African American women show affection to their children. I identified with the women having experienced the same thing as I did with my mother. She had difficulty showing affection, however, she showed her love by her actions. She would also show

her love through sacrifices she made for me by providing whatever I needed and wanted. I find myself doing the opposite of her, as shared by women in the focus groups. We try to give our children what we feel we missed out on in childhood. There is gap in the literature with regard to the role of spirituality and the demonstration of love for African American women in leadership and mothering.

The research supports how African Americans use spirituality in their leadership (Berry, 2008; Hye-cheon & Yeary, 2011; Loder, 2005; Lyon, 2013; Ogletree, 2012; Skerkat, 2002). A gap in literature exists with the discussion of perspectives of African American children and how they perceive the love and spirituality in the context of how their mother shows her love. As discussed in both focus groups, African American mothers experienced less affection, however, they show more affection to their own children. As explained by several of the women, they give what they feel they missed. The women described the lack of affection as follows: “I didn’t grow up with, someone always hugging and saying I love you;” “But as far as I love you and all that affection, we didn’t grow up with a lot of that;” “... there was actually no hugging nor kissing nor touching...”

Perhaps it is because the men in the study are ministers that they did not refer to motherly affection, which seems to support the research described in Chapter II. According to Hye-cheon and Yeary (2011), the male role is often one of authority while the female role is often placed under male authority. Based on these findings, the literature does not support that African American women have different ways of showing love. African American women show love through provision, care, concern,

and discipline. This provision, care, concern, and discipline influences what mothers teach their children about school.

Theme: African American women pass on strength as a legacy. When children reflect on the attributes of strength in their mothers, they recall perseverance, discipline, and overcoming as examples of true womanhood and adulthood. African American women working to promote women of color were supported in Chapter II, however, there is limited information on African American women transferring strength to other African American women. As the researcher, I think naturally I assumed that strength research would yield more data when looking at African American mothers from a strength-perspective. The research on the biographies of Anna Julia Cooper and Mary McLeod Bethune supports the fact that Black women effect change when they pass on their strength by how they use their voice to teach life lessons. Anna Julia Cooper promoted the education of women and she used her voice to add to the body of literature for Black Feminism (Bailey, 2004; Cooper, 1892/1998; McCluskey, 1989). Mary McLeod Bethune (Barr, 2009; McCluskey, 1989) demonstrated her legacy of strength as she sought to change the educational experience for Black women and men. Both women left their voice on record through their actions and their words as a legacy for all African American women.

The women in the focus groups shared their experiences with their mothers during the discussions. Like them, I could recall conversations and lessons I learned from my mother. The lessons that we were taught became the legacy of strength from our mothers. As shared by one participant, whether the lesson is good or bad, it becomes

the voice of their mother concerning what to do and what not to do. They recalled the voices of their mothers teaching about education and now they impart the same lessons in their children. For example the participants noted lessons such as: “Don’t just stay stuck and put yourself in a box;” “Just continue to get education, whatever method that is;” and “I think whatever path that they decide on, you just have to encourage them in it.”

As a woman, I have learned that we hear the voices of our mothers, whether the lessons are positive or negative, they all speak. Although my mother was educated, she knew my father was not educated and she wanted better for me. She compelled me to go beyond her own accomplishments, and so, she was a constant presence in my education. She showed her strength by the work ethic and responsibility she taught me with regard to my education. Her relentlessness propelled me higher than I felt I was capable of at the time.

The mothers in the study shared the impact of discipline from a mother’s perspective and much of what they shared reflects the discipline of strong Black women as referenced in the literature and shared by Alice Walker’s (1979) depiction of a Womanist. What can be seen as womanish can also be seen as strength and perseverance in a woman. Walker describes the revelation of being womanish as the way a woman sees herself. This perspective certainly supports the notion that a Black woman understands what it means to be strong. When mothers are described by children their strong stance on discipline, religion, and the overcoming of obstacles becomes the strength of her character. Cooper (1998) mothered, taught, and crusaded on behalf of

the African American learner and their right to an equitable education (Lembert, 1998; May, 2007). The literature in Chapter II supports a woman's establishment of identity as a womanist, however, Bowman (2006) and Smith (2006) assert there is little research on the womanist approach and the strength-perspective, especially in the area of education.

How Do My Experiences Support the Plight of African American Mothers who Experience Struggles with Schools as they Raise their Children?

Theme: African American women and mothers' views on education are paramount in the Black community. African American mothers' views education as important to success in life. Education is emphasized and the achievement of African American children is enforced in the home. In Chapters I and II, the literature showed strong support for education in the Black community (Barnes, 2005, Collins & Butler 2007; Ford & Helms 2012; Mattis, 2001). In Chapter I, an overview of the history of African American education was shared, giving insight into the history of education and the history of the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). Furthermore, the 60th anniversary of *Brown* revealed evidence of the re-segregation of schools based on socio-economic status, while also including race as a context. While the literature supports perspectives that challenge the plight of African American children, there is not enough research expressing this concern from a African American mother's perspective on education, especially in a "womanish" manner.

Chapter II offers a perspective on the growing need for African American women in educational leadership, however, there is limited research on African American women who are mothers in educational leadership. The literature supports the

view of African American women and their ability to lead from culturally relevant perspectives (Haar & Robicheau, 2008; Howard, 2011; Kruger, 2008; McCray et al., 2007; Webb-Johnson, 2002, 2004; Young et al., 2010). The data analysis from my autoethnography reveals perceptions on the importance of education in the Black household. Participants in the young mother's group, shared their own perspectives on the importance of education for their children. They are each strong proponents of education. They also shared examples of how they stress the importance of education with their children.

As a mother, I also share their sentiments on the importance of education. This is evidenced in the transcripts of my daughters Melissa, Courtney, and Alexis. They each referenced their perception of how I related the importance of education to them. They also shared how this influenced their academic achievement. Alexis shared that she felt she had no alternative but to obtain a college degree. Courtney shared her indecisiveness as she exited high school. She described it as a time of uncertainty. Yet, she realized that she must complete the college degree. As a mother, the emphasis of higher education never wavered. Courtney credits the motivation to go and finish college to the pressure applied by me as a mother. Melissa viewed her experiences and concerns as growth and achievement. She saw my role as more of a motivator, than a disciplinarian. As a researcher, it is important that my three varied approaches yielded the same outcomes with my daughters. I taught them all the same with regard to the importance of education; however, they each internalized it in different ways. They each understood

that the bottom line was a bachelor's degree was a must and the master's degree should be obtained as well.

The African American women's focus groups shared their views of what they teach their children about the importance of education. There was variation in their responses as not all of them came from homes where education was stressed. In fact, only one woman from this group had a college education, the rest had good jobs and one was an entrepreneur. They each shared that they thought education was important, but they believed there was more than one path to education (meaning that it might not be college). I feel the 20th century biography of Mary McLeod Bethune supports this perspective, as her life's work was dedicated to helping women find other paths to education. While Bethune sought to influence on the lives of women and education in the 20th century, as an African American woman in leadership, I plan to use my voice in Black Womanist Theology to promote African American females in leadership. In the 21st century, the African American culture and multicultural perspective needs to be personified in the rank of school administrators. Students of color need to see school administrators who reflect their culture (Li-Yuan, Larke, & Hill-Jackson, 2011). The understanding of African American culture will allow school administrators and community leaders to bridge the gap between parents and schools.

Discussion

I began this journey seeking to find my voice as a Black Womanist Theologist. Initially, I knew a little about multicultural education and critical race theory. After discussing my interest with my committee chair, I discovered that though I had an

interest in Black feminism, it really did not fit my core belief as a woman of God. I was more interested in discovering who I am as a daughter, woman, wife, educator, mother, and leader. This inquiry guided me down a path of discovery of me as a woman from every angle. I began by building a foundation in the history of education through understanding how history has impacted the education of African American children. Further, I wanted to know what I as researcher could learn and how my life as a spiritual leader offers me a perspective that is different from merely reviewing literature without this cultural context. I set out learn about Black Womanism, as it was a feminist approach that helped me understand what makes a Black woman's viewpoint relevant in society. This took me to a review of literature on African American women in church leadership and educational leadership. I wanted to see how I could merge my leadership roles as a co-pastor and educational leader. I learned that the Black Womanist Theology as a theoretical framework would allow me to do that. I conducted research that gave examples of strong Black women who had successfully achieved what I was attempting. I found these examples by studying Anna Julia Cooper and Mary McLeod Bethune. The biographical results yielded an important piece, helping me define my roles in life as daughter, wife, mother, mentor, and leader. This revelation gave my study direction. I knew that as woman, I function in these roles every day, however, I wanted to find out the totality and essence of who I was as a woman moving beyond the doctorate and how I planned to live and research phenomena as a daughter, caregiver, wife, mother, mentor, and leader. Contextually, I grew through this experience. I journeyed from the wilds of South Africa, to national conferences, to funerals, college graduations, and Bible studies

to discover, what I learned along the way about the strength of a mother and other strong Black women. The experiences have grounded me and allowed me to lift my voice with a confidence needed to contribute as a woman situated in Black Womanist Theology.

As I began my journey, I could not articulate where my zeal and inner strength came from. I attributed it to my mother's strength and watching her overcome an abusive marriage, discrimination, and sickness. I have learned during the course of my journey that I rely on my beliefs to overcome pain and adversity as an educated African American woman. Inner strength has become my self-made fortress that is centered on my relationship Christ. This resilience has allowed me to overcome without fear of growing weary, somehow I have always believed I could do whatever I have set my mind to (Laditka et al., 2010; O'Connor, 2011). This determination helped me to overcome disappointments, personal health challenges, and even the death of my mother. I have learned that overcoming became a personal goal that has led me to where I am now in life. The greatest revelation of healing came when I realized, through it all, that the pain I felt throughout my life was really a facade that masked the inner peace I felt inside and the peace was actually waiting to be released from the inside out. My journey continues in peace, resilience and self-discovery as I continue to ground myself a Black Womanist.

Recommendations

There are recommendations that warrant further study, as derived from the study. Further study of African American mothers as viewed from a strength perspective is

needed. For example, more research is needed to understand how the strength of a mother influences the way self-esteem develops in African American children. More study on African American mothering from an African American male perspective on love and affection might assist educators in further understanding the relationships between African American mothers and sons in order to promote academic achievement for African American males. Additionally, the study revealed the lack of love and affection shown by African American mothers towards their daughters, further research on relationships, mentoring, and leadership is needed. A larger focus group of women would offer more insight. This study also identified a need for parenting classes for African American males to assist them in learning how to foster better relationships with their children, primarily their daughters. Lastly, it is recommended that further research be conducted on the role of African American women in ministry and their mentoring roles in the non-denominational church.

Implications for Future Research

Educational leaders are challenged with changing demographics. Student populations are becoming increasingly diverse (Anderson, 2007; Baker, 2011; Chambers 2009; Henry, 2011; Young et al., 2010). Schools are becoming more diverse and the landscape of academic achievement for African American children continues to fall below that of their White counterparts (Anderson, 2007; Howard, 2011). There is growing need for African American female leadership. Research has also shown a growing trend for attracting more females to the field of educational administration (Haar & Robicheau, 2008; Howard, 2011; Kruger, 2008; McCray et al., 2007; Young et

al., 2010), yet this is not the case for women of color and especially African American women, and especially in the role of superintendent. This thrust will not only benefit the role of female leadership, but it will offer a much needed cultural perspective that is sorely different from traditional forms of educational leadership, which in the past has been dominated by White males (Haar & Robicheau, 2009; Kruger, 2008).

Furthermore, African American women offer a cultural presence in educational leadership that would otherwise be void in urban schools (Berry, 2008; Ogletree, 2012; Rose, 2013). In order to bridge the gap between culturally relevant leadership and traditional modes of leadership (i.e., transformational, distributive), superintendents in urban districts must move beyond placing African American leaders in principals' roles simply to salvage schools that are low-performing and in low socio-economic areas. Although many African American females are serving as principals and many are experiencing success in the urban setting, their leadership practices and expertise often goes unrecognized and under-utilized. African American women need more opportunities in school leadership.

Understanding the role of mothers in the African American community allows school leaders to become culturally responsive by better understanding Black culture (Boykin, 1983; Webb-Johnson, 1994, 2004). The women in this study offered insight into to what some African American children are taught in the home about the importance of education. When school principals begin to view African American mothers as their partners in education, African American student achievement will improve (Boykin, 1983; Webb-Johnson, 1994, 2004; Young et al., 2011).

Further research is needed on the influence of the non-traditional church as a positive influence and partnership for African American student mentoring. As cited the research, the Black church has long been a positive influence on children of color (Cummings & Latta, 2010; Sanders, 1996; William & Frame, 1999). Educators must continue to search for ways to partner with traditional and non-traditional churches to foster academic achievement for African American learners. Our nation is becoming more diverse and students of color are becoming the new majority. Schools look at the churches that are now more reflective of our school populations. Our churches have now become more mission-focused, which shows they are also embracing a 21st century perspective on the modern church (Berry, 2008; Hye-cheon & Yearly, 2011; Loder, 2005; Lyon, 2013; Ogletree, 2012; Skerkat, 2002).

Conclusion

As an African American woman in search of finding voice in Black Womanist Theology, the premise of this research study was geared toward understanding the African American woman's role a daughter, wife, mother, teacher, and leader. It was the goal of the study to contribute to the literature on African American female leadership from a strength-perspective to better understand the plight of the African American student. While the need for the African Americans female perspective offers insight into the African American community, it also offers a multicultural perspective on school administration. As our schools become more diverse, the role of the African American female is paramount to the achievement of the African American learner.

Post-Script

When I began this autoethnographic journey I did not realize how difficult it would be to capture my thoughts and feelings and then process them all. I began by journaling about my past experiences. Until this study, I thought I had a poor memory. It is amazing how much I was able to recall and relive as I wrote about the emotional experiences of my past. I chronicled my life from childhood to present day. I was able to unearth sensory details that brought back sight, sounds, and even smells. This, by far, is the most powerful self-renewal I have ever experienced.

I learned about myself as a daughter. I was aware that I had to capacity for forgiveness in my heart but, I understand why I feel that way and I learned that comes from my strength as a woman of God. Forgiving my father was one of the most profound things I have done in my life. I think one of the greatest discoveries of this journey was actually going back and examining the acts and gestures of my parents and receiving the revelation of their acts of love juxtaposed to the resentment I felt about how I grew up. I never saw my mother's act of staying as an act of love until now. I also never saw my father's generosity as an act of love towards me. Now I see it and it seems so plain. The joy and pride he has shared with me through this dissertation has been wonderful. He beams with pride and that is new for me, yet wonderful to experience.

Like the movie *Akeelah and the Bee*, I have had hundreds of supporters on this journey with me. I have been surrounded by many coaches. As an African American woman in search of voice, I found it. I see the values I have shared with my daughters,

my family, and the women I mentor. I have embraced my focus on African American female perspectives in education and the desire to contribute to this area of research. I have a clear path. Along the path, I felt God guiding me to this point of wholeness and peace. I was once a woman torn asunder by worry for the cares of life. I felt tired but through this journey, I received renewal. I have listened to voices of the women in my life both past and present and I have for the first time, heard my own voice magnified. So, when I am asked what was the result of the autoethnographic journey? I will respond, it was my journey to wholeness, where I learned that all pain is resolve in love and peace comes as result of it all.

I also learned that I know more than I have given myself credit for in my beliefs as an educator and leader. I have emerged more confident in research and writing. When I began writing this paper, I saw it as a daunting task that seemed impossible. Now that I am at the end, I know that God intended for me to make it to the end because he has a purpose for me in higher education.

I have both triumphed and struggled during this research journey. I have learned many lessons about life and about myself as a woman. As I process all I learned and all I experienced has left a lingering effect on my development as womanist and on my heart daughter, wife, mentor, and leader. The following are some of my triumphs and struggles.

In my reflection of my mother, I found the love in her selfless act of staying with my father. I still struggle with coping with her death and absence from my life. I have had to learn to mother from my memories of her and that has been difficult for me. My

daughters are now grown and I live every day hoping that she is looking down from heaven and saying, “good job.” I have loved my aunts for all the love they shown me since my mother’s death. They have each been a mother-figure in my life in various ways. The wisdom they share allows me to hear their voice as well as my grandmothers.

My reflection of my father is still a complicated one. He lives with me now and we have daily struggles of trying to find compatibility. Although our relationship has improved in many regards, it is still a work in progress. We differ on almost everything, but we both agree that love is the principle thing.

I see my relationship with my husband as the thing that keeps me centered. Throughout this journey he has been my constant. He allowed me the space to grow during the process and that has helped to give me the validation I needed. In him, I have found the love and support that I missed out on from my father.

The joy of what I learned of my daughters is most profound. As I reflect, I believe I got a chance to hear what a mother can only hope to see and hear. I learned that they have the tangible and intangible lessons that I have taught them about love, forgiveness, education, and God and have applied them to their life perspectives. For me that was a triumph for me as a mother. I still struggle with knowing whether or not I have taught them enough.

My mentees taught me that as African American women, we are more alike than different. We have all experienced pain in our lives and our resiliency is the thing that brought us together. Because life is always changing, I struggle with finding ways to keep them inspired.

One of my greatest triumphs on this journey is the peace and resolve I have received. The peace I feel has given me the inner strength I need to bring the closure I need to finally accept my mother's death, something that I have struggled with since she passed on September 12, 1996. Today my struggle is learning to be comfortable with thinking about her. In June of 2014, I visited my mother's grave cite for the first time since her death 17 years ago...

I paused on my journey to reflect on how I arrived at peace. I have concluded that my peace was masked by pain. Once I came to terms with my pain and decided to move beyond the confines of that pain, I uncovered the joy of a peaceful existence as woman. I think Nikki Giovanni's poem *Nikki-Rosa* is the epitome of my own experience as an African American woman. I share this as my reflection of my journey from pain to peace. Poem by Nikki Giovanni (1970):

Nikki-Rosa

childhood remembrances are always a drag
if you're Black
you always remember things like living in Woodlawn
with no inside toilet
and if you become famous or something
they never talk about how happy you were to have
your mother
all to yourself and
how good the water felt when you got your bath

from one of those
big tubs that folk in chicago barbecue in
and somehow when you talk about home
it never gets across how much you
understood their feelings
as the whole family attended meetings about Hollydale
and even though you remember
your biographers never understand
your father's pain as he sells his stock
and another dream goes
And though you're poor it isn't poverty that
concerns you
and though they fought a lot
it isn't your father's drinking that makes any difference
but only that everybody is together and you
and your sister have happy birthdays and very good
Christmases
and I really hope no white person ever has cause
to write about me
because they never understand (Giovanni,
Black love is Black wealth and they'll
probably talk about my hard childhood

and never understand that

all the while I was quite happy

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APPENDIX A

FOCUS GROUPS

TRANSCRIPT EXECERPTS

Gentle Gem:

I remembered everything that my mom did before she left and my brother did not remember. I remember her taking us to nightclubs and leaving us home alone and he didn't remember. And I was so angry at him because he didn't remember and I had to live with all the pain and no one knowing. But, um, my grandmother, she did everything she could for us. She provided us with the best of everything. And but there was no relationship, um. She didn't sit down and talk to me. She didn't tell me – I know she loved me but she didn't tell me that. But probably when I was 18 she came back I the picture. She had been in prison. She had just did so many different things with her life. But she [mom] came back and I don't know something was within me. I wanted to form a relationship with her. And I wanted – I just wanted to. And so we did. And her life was still totally different from mine but I was dedicated to just getting to know who she was.

And so I learned that from her. To love just regardless, because even though I think about – you know, she left, and everything,

and she could have sensed that I had this hatred, because it was at a point where I felt like I hated her, and she could have just not wanted to form that relationship, even though I am her daughter. But then she was – hard to say but she was willing to form that relationship again with me. So I think just being open to just receiving past the hurt, because I'm sure she was hurt, too, you know.

I tell my children, I love you, and we hug, and we play, and we wrestle, and we do all those things, but I'm still mom, you know? I'm not their friend. But then we have that relationship where they can come and play with me, you know? My role in their education, education is very, very, very important to me. And so, um, I want them to try everything. I want them to try to reach for their goals.

Cool Roadie:

So I'm being raised by my grandmother, and being brought up by my grandmother, and then my brother comes on the scene, and instead of – here, again, I'm thinking, she's gone, my mom's going to take me and my brother and we're going to go and we're going to be one happy family, but that didn't happen. Again, my grandmother began to raise me and my brother. And so that

relationship with my mom, it was hard growing up. I didn't respect her. We fought and I mean literally fist to fist, slap to slap, because I had no respect for her.

– my belief in my mothering style and hers is totally different.

I'm a little bit more patient with my children, where I feel my mother is not. Again, I do love all my children. I do tell them I love them. And, like you said, I'm there. I'm actually visible in the house with them all the time and I let them know that I'm there and I'm a lot I think more supportive than she was to me. I'm an educator to heart, I think, uh, education is important with my kids, and I often tell them failure is not an option. It is not an option. And by any means necessary, education is important. And I try to undergird that with them. And I try to show them things outside of what their norm is. And how they're able to achieve that.

I have to explain to my oldest daughter that I'm not your friend. I'm your mother. And then there are certain ways that you cannot talk to me. You can't treat me like I'm your friend. Even though you feel that I'm your best friend and you can tell me everything. There are certain boundaries that come with being your mother. There are certain conversations I, at this point, don't want to have with you. And I don't want to discuss with you. And then there

are certain things as your mother that I'm not going to discuss openly about my life and my experiences yet. I don't feel comfortable at this point to share with her, um, about some of the personal aspects of my life. Because I am her mother, and I want to shield her to a certain point from certain experiences that I have until I feel that she's ready.

Spunky Heel Wearing Chick

It was – our [mom and I] relationship was interesting, because she wasn't as educated. And so when it came to homework, when I got into the advanced classes, it wasn't a lot that she could offer me in that sense, but I didn't really need it, you know, so it was okay. But she was the one, you know? She sometimes rode the bus with us to athletic events. I mean she was always in the stands. She probably didn't know much about what was going on, but she was in the stands. So we didn't really sit down and have those talks as a mom and daughter. We didn't have those mother daughter moments. I mean those real intimate moment. We didn't have those.

It's interesting, because she's [mom] – came down this weekend and last night I was washing dishes and she was sitting on the couch and inside I really was like, you know, part of me wants to do the TV mom daughter thing, maybe I should go sit and lay on

her shoulder, but we never really had that, you know? Where I would just go lay on her, be like, oh mom, you know? So I'm sitting there washing dishes and looking at her like, should I try it *[laughter]*? And in the end – because you know when I sit down, my boys, they'll come lay on me. But in the end, we didn't do – I didn't go for it *[laughter]*. Maybe next time.

And, you know, if they have an event at school, I will be that smiling face they can look for in the audience. And so it's like, oh, you going to be in sports, I'm going to take you to practice, I'm going to make sure you signed up, I'm going to go outside and play with you. I want them to see me in the kitchen baking cookies, and making dinner, and, um, even though, still, I'm not able to be the one there all the time to get them on and off the bus, the roles, we've made a conscious decision to change that.

I want them to love education like I loved it. I want them to love going to school, to love learning something new in math, because that's what I feel like. I loved going to school.

Private Major

My parenting style is – I don't think is anything like my mom's. I think in the sense that she worked a lot, so we missed out on a lot as far as I missed out on a lot as far as relationship was concerned. I try to make it a priority because there were times that I did work

a lot with my children, and so but I made it a priority to, you know, still come home and have that time for them. Being a single mom, it's not like, you know, they have somebody to, you know, fill in while I'm not there. Um, so I try and make that a priority, you know, for them.

I do share those with him [son] because he's at that age that, um, he's about to start making those same decisions. And so, um, you know, I am a mother to him. He's active in sports, so I'm always there, trying to support him, you know, in his next endeavor to, you know, go out into the world, make it a career decision. Um. I just – I want him to be more – even more successful than I feel like my life is. Um. Whether that be to, you know, get a college degree, or just to actually have a career and not be from job to job or be on this job one year and this job two years. You know, I would like for his life, both of my children's lives, to be, um, you know, just more successful.

Gabby Girl

We went to church with her, and I – the most of my life I just remember my mom being more active in church. So, as far as, um, my work ethic, you know, my spiritual life, um, how I'm sure, you know, if I had children, how I would care for my children. It came from her because she was very attentive, you know, to our

needs and, um, she was just a hardworking person, and she, she worked so much that even if we did things in school, she couldn't support us in that because she was always at work or taking care of home.

I don't remember a lot of hugs and kisses and stuff like that. My mom was just a really, really hard working person and, uh, I think the way she showed her love to us was giving us stuff. We got a lot of stuff, you know, growing up. We still get a lot of stuff. .

Um, I, I wouldn't say that I have a very, uh, strong, like trusting relationship with my mom either. . Sometimes she can be really negative and sometimes she can be mean to people, and I don't like that, so I'll call her out on it. I mean I love my mom like crazy, who doesn't? You know, but I don't have a very, very close trusting relationship with her like that, not at all.

I don't have any children. I have but one God daughter, but it's been always very important to me, uh. I think from my mom I did get that really giving to people. I mean sometimes I go overboard giving to people, and I know that, but it's my way of showing love, but that's not the only way I show love to them, but I've tried to make it a practice as much as I can. I've seen the sacrifices that she's made to make sure that we're very successful in life.

So I think it's very important, you know, although I'm not a mother, I strive very hard to be a positive role model in the lives of, uh, children in the community. And, you know, to, uh, encourage them, you know, to be all they can be, and to let them know that, you know, there are ways to get to where they want to go, and um, to help them to do that and be that.

African Lioness

I really admire the fact that she and my dad worked together, and any decision made, she went through him or she, um, she was always big on letting him have the role of the man although it took both of them in deciding factor. She didn't go to college, but she worked on a job for 30-some odd years, and she believed in saving, and that was instilled in me. She, she was the mother that, um, taught me how to raise my kids. At each pregnancy, she was there. She stayed with me for weeks, and made sure that I was okay. So she was a homebody, and she took care of her home, took care of us, took care of her mother up until her death, and she just was a caregiver.

So, those were some simple life lessons, you know, that she that she taught me, but caring for people was the biggest thing for you. You know, giving people the benefit of the doubt and seeing the good, you know, versus the bad in people.

I say that I have three sons, so I think you have to know your child, and I think whatever path that they decide on, you just have to encourage them in it. I do believe that education comes in different forms. It's not always going to the collegiate school. Um, I have an artist and I think that he needs to pursue that. You know, I, I tell all of them to follow your passion.

Yellow Butterfly

My mom did not work outside the home, but she was always, you know, where – strength and she always taught us to get an education because she didn't have a full high school education. I saw my mom go through physical stuff, physical fights with my dad. Oh, she took him on too. My dad was a boxer. He could have, but – and I asked her, “Why did you stay?” She said, “Because I loved him.” I said, “Okay.” I said, “But beyond that –” I couldn't get anything from her, but other than to say why did she stay? My dad was a high-functioning alcoholic, but she, she stayed through that, you know.

My mom had a childhood that she raised all her brothers and sisters. I think it was ten or more of them. Um, my mom had survived thyroid cancer, breast cancer, a double mastectomy, a year ago, two years ago. And as far as from a Biblical perspective, I remember going to church both sides, going to church with my

mom and being on the – being put on the school bus, Sunday school bus to go without my mom, so I remember both sides of that. But when we were all baptized, I remember her being there, and when we lived in these small towns, you know, we went to churches.

My relationship with my mom is, is good, but at times it, it's strainful, it's, it's stressful for me because as, as she's aged and she's, you know, without the father she has a tendency to pull on me more, even though we have – I have a brother and a sister.

Before my sister's passing, it was my older sister that I went to before my mom because it did not feel like a safe place to me.

With my older sister, it felt safe.

I took a negative and turned it into a positive that with my kids I wanted them to know that you can come talk to me about anything. I'm approachable whatever it is, you know, whatever it is, and both of them,

You know, so I'm just, you know, so it's just whatever role in education that they choose, whatever path, whether it be the Military, whether it be, you know, whatever that goal is just focus. But continue to build yourself up some kind of way. Don't just stay stuck and put yourself in a box. Just continue to get education, whatever method that is, you know.

Homecoming Queen USA

And, uh, a little later she actually became the school cafeteria – she managed our school cafeteria for about 20 years after that. So, um, but I do not recall lacking or needing anything because she made a way to provide for all of us no matter what. Um, she was a good woman. I, I speak in the past tense, but she is still alive. She's, she's not, uh, deceased, but she has Alzheimer's and she doesn't recognize any of her kids anymore.

She, um, she was a really car, caring person, always giving, always encouraging. I guess that's some of the traits I may have, uh, picked up from her. But there was actually no hugging nor kissing nor touching in the family, and uh, never, "I love you." That's some of the things I never heard, so I've always been a little uncomfortable in saying it myself. That's something I actually have to, uh, get over, but, uh, just didn't hear it. It just wasn't said up until probably only recently within the last ten years have I ever said, "I love you" to her and she's actually said it back, you know? I didn't have a relationship with her where I would actually just talk to her about anything. Um, I would go to my older sisters if I needed anything or wanted to talk with them, anything that I didn't want her to know or was too embarrassed to bring to her.

Nobody encouraged me or told me I needed to stay in school.

I think that if someone told me that, I would have stayed, because I listen. *[laughter]* I, I did listen, but no one actually encouraged me. So, when I go back home now to Alabama, I see my little, my cousins down there, and I encourage the, and I try to instill in them to go to school because down there it's like, I mean, I would say in a small town, there's a population only probably about 2,000 people. And in that town, the average person goes to high school; you get out of high school; you get a job at the plant, and just work at the plant for the rest of your life.

APPENDIX B

FAMILY PARTICIPANT

TRANSCRIPT EXECERPTS

Naomi Johnson

So she was – she was very strong but it was like they [siblings], uh, like they looked to her for the wisdom. I guess I learned that I could do – I can do whatever I need to do. Uh, I-I don't think that – I don't think that there's anything that-that I need to do, uh, okay like when Little Bit was young. I don't think there was anything that I thought I couldn't handle. Uh, like you think about how mama did everything. I mean that-that had to be really, uh – and she probably didn't even think hard about it. But when I would think about it I would – I would go, "How could she do that?" You know, she had nine kids. I had one.

You know I knew that – that, uh, God was the head of my life. And, uh, but I didn't know it as much then – I mean I've learned that now. I didn't know it as much back then. I guess it was in me though you know? Because, you know, that's the way I was raised so I guess it was in me, but it's-it's not like I was really dependent on God back then that much. I think the one thing that-that – And I definitely think I've passed that on to Kim, to don't depend on

anybody else. You know, just-just don't say, "I'm gonna marry this man and he's gonna take care of me," you know?

Ellen Wilson

I was a single parent. And I raised my children to, you know, be respectable among others. And it was – I had to always keep a job, you know, because, you know, nobody was not going to, you know, take care of you, you know, you had to do what you could, you know. The main thing was keeping a job and keeping your children clothed and fed. My son have a son and my daughter have a son. And they have instilled in them good morals and everything. Teaching them how to respect others, you know, and everything– when you look at a black American woman, you always want to look at that person as being respectable and you know like a role model for somebody.

My 12 year old grandson is in the 6th grade. Last year I was able to – we was able to go to the same school. And, um, education was very important there because I knew all his teachers and, uh, I would, uh, I was concerned about his grades and everything, but he made good grades and good choices. My 18 year old grandson is now out – I kept on stressing it, so he's at Blinn and taking up some classes at the junior college and he going to transfer later. So education is – has been instilled in them.

Doris Guyden

I really am always taken back by the lessons that my mother taught me, and as subtle as they seemed then, as I got older and especially as I became a parent and now a grandparent, that they are just – they scream out loud. Be responsible for yourself and you can – no matter what your plight in life is, it – be that, you know, you're a single parent or a married person, um, be that you're rich or poor or in between – That you can always have dignity about yourself and that would reflect how other people or dictate how other people would treat you, and that was a very, very important lesson that my mother taught me.

I taught my son always to give your very best –I think he reflects that and then he's really, uh, been proactive in – in, um, you know, giving his daughters that kind of counsel. To love yourself because, when you love yourself, you're better able to love other people. To take care of yourself whether it's spiritually, physically, mentally, emotionally take good care to care for yourself –

Allan Abney

My mother raised us as a single parent for the bulk of our lives but she tried to, um, give us a father and married one other time after being married to my father. And living in our home was – it was

a little challenging because I was at home a lot, home alone a lot. My mother worked. When I was “a latchkey kid.” And you know, she came home in the evenings and it was usually pretty late when she came home, you know, after dark but what stands out a lot is my mother was a very hard worker and did a lot to provide for me and my brother. She always wanted us to have what other kids had and generally we received those things around Christmas and birthdays but being at home was a little lonely because she was gone a lot.

She [mother], she was a strong disciplinarian. Uh, she demanded, she demanded the best from us. She didn't let us be mediocre and I – she wasn't college educated. Well somewhat. She dropped out of school but her, her, her desire was for us to go to college and she, I remember her telling us “I don't care what degree you get just as long as you get a college degree and once you get that I'm done.” We all had different fathers and I believe that that, that had something to do with it but her desire and you could see it in her parenting. She did everything she could to raise us to be close as siblings. She made tremendous sacrifices for us, tremendous sacrifices and I, I saw it. It wasn't – all I can say is that I saw it. If it was working hard, if it was going without. She went without for years so that we could have.

My wife is my best friend and I'm not just saying that because it sounds good. I can tell my wife anything. My relationship with my wife is strong. I can, I can be vulnerable around my wife and not be afraid. I feel with my wife, she makes me feel more secure than anybody in my, that I've ever met in my life and I don't know – at this point in my life I don't know life, the only life I know is the life I have with my wife. I've been with her more than I've been, than I was with my mother and so my – the man that I am today is defined more by my relationship with her than with any other woman. [I am] absolutely proud. I think you are capable of being so much more. Some people see this doctorate as a, you know, a stopping point but watching you over the years go from the Bachelor's to where you are now I'm just absolutely proud. You're the smartest woman I know. You're very determined and you know how to push and push and push until you get there and I think one of the things that I see more than anything is, and I wish I had more of this, is when you hit a place that seems as though I can't get around this it amazes me how you will sit down and you take some time and you think and you pray and when you come out of that time focus and you come up with this solution that propels you.

Charles Smith

My mother was – and father, they – my dad was a minister. He was a Methodist preacher. He was a Methodist preacher, my dad was. My mother stayed at home _ she didn't have to work, but she was very strict. We got a lot of whoopings. But she was a good mother, because she ran a – made sure we was in at night at a proper time. So momma was always momma. Uh, I learned how to respect other people. And I learned how to respect all elder people. I learned how to say yes ma'am and no ma'am and yes sir and no sir. My mother would – one thing about her, she made sure that we always going to get two meals a day. Couldn't feed us three meals a day because there was too many of us, so she fed us two meals a day. Oh, she instilled in me Christianity. Oh, yeah. Momma instilled Christianity in all of us. And one thing about that – before, like on Sunday morning, one of us had to pray every Sunday morning, one of us had to pray, and different one had to pray, and all through the week, uh, we'd get around the stove, and momma would – would, uh, would make us sing. And she loved to hear us sing.

Me and Minnie had a good relationship even from the time we met and I knew then that that was my wife. And then we decided to get married. This was after she had went out to Texas Southern and come back. Oh, it was wonderful, because she put me in the

mind of my mother a whole lot, you know, in the way she, uh, she carried herself. [She was a] Very good. Wonderful. Wonderful mother. Strict but wonderful- Very strong. Headstrong, too. She's [daughter] much like her mother, but we always got along real good, but my daughter is much like her mother, she's headstrong in, in, in, uh, things, uh. If she see it one way, that's one way she see it until you prove different, that's the way it is. Oh, Lord, she a very good mother. Three beautiful daughters whom I love a whole lot. But she had – Angie was the type that when she – before she go to work she would make sure her kids were safe, drive her way until she find me then I go back over and sit with the kids until she get off of work, which I didn't mind doing, because I wasn't doing nothing else at the time.

Melissa Abney

I think she's the epitome of what strength really is. Um, no matter what challenge she faces, she always has a – a positive outlook. Um, she's been through a lot of difficult things in her life, and, um, no matter what, she finds the good in it and finds a lesson from it. Uh, she is true- she is resilient. Um, just watching her overcome those challenges and even be here today working on this dissertation is really, um, shows the kind of person she is. One of the big ones [life lessons] is, when you have a dream, never

give up on it. Well, all throughout grade school, I wanted to do my best to make her and my dad proud was really key. Going to college, though, was a given. Like I had no – no choice. Because she always said that, no matter what, we were going to get a college degree. So, um, I knew, graduating from high school that that was no option, and I think that influence made me really desire it—

. I think, um, she's very nurturing. So I want to be the same, selfless, um, because, even in the fact that she put her dreams on hold to raise us and make sure that we were okay, always giving far beyond but not giving up and making sure that she does something for her – that was – that's really amazing to me

Courtney Abney

Well coming from an African American household God is the head of our – of our household. And everything that happens, um, is – God is consulted first. And we – We seek him first in everything so all decisions, all family decisions, all life decisions, um, are based off of Godly principles and I think that that – That runs deep in the African American community. I wanna be the type of mother that – I wanna take – I wanna be able to take all the lessons that I've learned from my mom and capture those moments, capture those qualities along with the lessons that I've

learned personally, um, things that I've learned about myself that have helped me overcome the things that I deal with personally and internally. I wanna take, um, also the lessons that, um, I've learned from my dad. But we're talking about my mother.

Alexis Abney

African American mothers do not want their child to amount to nothing. That is the reason why they instill education so deep into their children. They started from crawling on the ground, giving him a book, you're going to read this book, and they can't even talk. Education is not an option. Um, like I was saying, my mom has this role that she instilled in us since we were like in elementary school. You must graduate with your bachelor's degree before you even think about getting married, or she said, "You can stay engaged as long as you want to, but you must graduate with your four-year degree," which means, as I took, if I don't graduate, I'm not getting married. *[laughter]* I would have to stay single my whole life. So, if I want to get married, I must graduate with my bachelor's degree, but, um, I feel, um, my mom – she wants all of us – it's a necessity. It's not a want. We have to have an education because she feels that, um, in order to have a – I don't know the word I'm looking for.

But if – in order to have a comfortable life in the world that we
live in, you have to have an education to back you up because me,

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

DAUGHTER

(Today we will discuss your relationship with your mother and how it has influenced you as a woman and daughter)

1. How old are you?
2. Do you have siblings?
3. How would you describe your relationship with your mother?
4. How would you describe your mother from a strength perspective?
5. What life lessons have you learned from your mother?
6. Which lessons will you transfer to your own children?
7. In your opinion, what is the role of the AA mother in the AA community?
8. What is the role of the AA mother in education?
9. What was your mother's role in your education?
10. How many of your choices have been influenced by your mother?
11. What it inspires you the most about your mother?
12. What kind of mother do you want to be?

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL AUNT

1. How many children do you have?
2. What are their genders?
3. How would you describe your role as a mother in the life of your child(ren)?
4. Were you reared by an African American mother?
5. How would you describe your relationship with your mother?
6. Does your mothering style resemble that of your mother's? If so, how?
7. What are to three most important life lessons you have learned from mother?
8. Which life lessons have you tried to instill in your child(ren)?
9. How do you think the strength perspective has influenced you as a mother?

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

FATHER

1. Were you raised by an AA mother?
2. Do you have siblings? How many? Gender?
3. What was it like growing up in your home?
4. How would you describe your mother's parenting style?
5. How would you describe your relationship with your mother?
6. What life lessons did you learn from your mother?
7. Was there a particular life lesson or motto that she instilled in you from a strength perspective?
8. If you could describe your mother by using one word what would that be?
9. From a male perspective and thinking about your mother what attributes were you looking for in a wife?
10. How long have (were) you and your wife been married?
11. How would you describe your relationship?
12. What has it been like for you as you have shared and watched as your wife's trajectory?
13. How would you describe her as a mother?
14. How many children do you have? Gender?
15. How would you describe what you have seen from a strength perspective?
16. If you could describe your wife by using one word what would that be?
17. How would you describe your relationship with your daughter?
18. How would you describe her as a mother?
19. How would you describe what you have seen from a strength perspective?
20. What do you think about her pathway to the doctorate?

APPENDIX F
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
HUSBAND

1. Were you raised by an AA mother?
2. Do you have siblings? How many? Gender?
3. What was it like growing up in your home?
4. How would you describe your mother's parenting style?
5. How would you describe your relationship with your mother?
6. What life lessons did you learn from your mother?
7. Was there a particular life lesson or motto that she instilled in you from a strength perspective?
8. If you could describe your mother by using one word what would that be?
9. From a male perspective and thinking about your mother what attributes were you looking for in a wife?
10. How long have you and your wife been married?
11. How would you describe your relationship?
12. What has it been like for you as you have shared and watched as your wife's trajectory?
13. How would you describe her as a mother?
14. How many children do you have? Gender?

15. How would you describe what you have seen from a strength perspective?
16. If you could describe your wife by using one word what would that be?
17. What do you think about her pathway to the doctorate?

APPENDIX G
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
FOCUS GROUPS

Focus Group #1:

- A. How many children do you have?
- B. What are their genders?
- C. How would you describe your role as a mother in the life of your child(ren)?
- D. Were you reared by an African American mother?
- E. How would you describe your relationship with your mother?
- F. Does your mothering style resemble that of your mother's? If so, how?
- G. What are to three most important life lessons you have learned from mother?
- H. Which life lessons have you tried to instill in your child(ren)?
- I. In your opinion, what has been the most challenging aspect of parenting?
- J. How do you view your role as a mother in the community?
- K. How do you view your role as a mother in the education of your child(ren)?

Focus Group #2

- A. Were you raised by an AA woman?
- B. How many children were in your household?

- C. What are their genders?
- D. Were all you reared by your mother?
- E. How would you describe your mother's role in your life?
- F. How would you describe your relationship with your mother?
- G. What as a mother is your perspective on the role of AA mothers in the AA community?
- H. What is your perspective on the role of AA mothers in education?

APPENDIX H

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

Dear Potential Research Participant,

I am thrilled to say that I am nearing the end of my graduate studies at Texas A&M University. I have been working towards obtaining my doctorate in Education Administration, a journey I began in the fall of 2007.

This study is based on qualitative research method and information offered in this study will assist in better understanding the influence of strength and mothering of African American women. Additionally, it will offer insight into the lives and roles of African American women and their spirituality and cultural perspectives. The study is titled, "*Pathways From Pain to Peace: An African American Woman Finding Voice in Black Womanist Theology and Leadership*." This dissertation will explore my life time of active engagement in resounding questions of my identity, more specifically the nature of my self-identity as woman and my journey from self-denial to self-discovery as a leader, daughter, wife, mother and teacher and how this has shaped my leadership.

The purpose of this study add to the body of literature that addresses educational leadership and the issues facing school administrators concerning African American student achievement, African American female leadership, and black womanist theory. This study will be explore the influence of the African American woman's personae and perspective on values, culture and motivation for the black community. As a research participant you will be able to offer your own experiences and share in the experiences of other African American women who have influenced academically, socially and culturally by role of the African American woman in their lives. The duration of Subject Participation is 45 days which includes one focus group session and one follow up session for analysis of data collected during the focus group session. The session will be four hours for the focus group session and two hours for the follow up for each individual participant. Participants will be asked to engage in reflective questioning and sharing during the four hour focus group session and also the two hour follow up session. Information and data obtained from focus group and follow up sessions will be used for research purpose only. Participants will be assigned pseudonyms and will be given fictitious names in order to protect your privacy.

Personally, I have had many life paths that I could have chosen for my research however, I have chosen to conduct a qualitative research study in the form of an Inquiry. It is my desire to include you in my study. Participation is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. You may contact Dr. Gwendolyn Webb-Hasan, faculty

advisor for questions, concerns or complaints about the research and/or your participation in this study at 979-458-3973 or gwebbj@tamu.edu.

Your input is invaluable; I am looking forward to you sharing your experiences.

Sincerely,

Angela Abney
Doctoral Student
Educational Administration
Texas A&M University
aabney@tamu.edu
832-549-1272

Consent to Partipate: Name_____Signature_____
Date_____

(Return signed consent page to Angela Abney, 26814 Rockwood Park Lane-Cypress, Texas 77433)

APPENDIX I
FACILITIES USAGE CONSENT

Hopeplex International Ministries ▪ 17774 Cypress-Rosehill Road ▪ Cypress, Texas 77429 ▪ 281.516.0385 ▪ www.thehoh.org

To: Angela Abney, Researcher
From: Andrea N. Jones, Board Member
RE: Agreement for Use of Facilities/Equipment

June 8, 2012

Dear Angela Abney,

This letter is to inform you that you have been granted permission to use facilities and equipment owned by Hopeplex International Ministries (HOPEPLEX).

1. **FACILITIES/EQUIPMENT:** HOPEPLEX grants Angela Abney permission to use the following:
 - a. Facility: Located at 17774 Cypress – Rosehill Road in Cypress, Texas 77429 Suites 1300, 1400, and 100.
 - b. Equipment: Audio/Visual equipment such as computers, projectors, projector screens, and microphones.
2. **PURPOSE OF USE OF FACILITIES/EQUIPMENT:** Angela Abney may use the Facilities/Equipment for research focus group meetings.
3. **PERIOD OF USE:** The dates and times that HOPEPLEX permits Angela Abney to use the Facilities/Equipment shall be June 1 - July 31, 2012.
4. **FEES FOR USE:** There are no fees associated with the usage of facilities/equipment for this purpose.

Signed:

Andrea N. Jones
Board Member
HOPEPLEX INTERNATIONAL MINISTRIES

Tax ID: 20-2193197